Interview with Peter D. Constable

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR PETER D. CONSTABLE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Note: This transcript was not edited by Ambassador Constable

Q: Peter, could you give me a little about your background, where you came from, how you were educated.

CONSTABLE: I went to Hamilton College where I got my B.A., majored in English and French, which seems unlikely for the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, you use a lot of English...

CONSTABLE: You use a lot of English, yes. And then after two years in the Army I went to graduate school and did a Masters at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), and in the meantime had taken the Foreign Service exams, and in 1957 came into the Foreign Service by way of a year with the Senate.

Q: What had interested you in the field of foreign affairs?

CONSTABLE: Well, I have to be very frank about this. I was just a young man finishing college.

Q: When did you graduate?

CONSTABLE: Summer of '53. My senior year I just had very little idea of what I wanted to do. I thought about law school and decided not to do that. It was sometime in the spring of my senior year when I saw a notice on the bulletin board about the Foreign Service exams.

Q: So this was not something you'd been preparing for all your life.

CONSTABLE: No, not at all. The preparation really came later when I realized how ill-prepared I was that I went to graduate school.

Q: But at that point you began to think much more in terms of graduate school as a beginning to focus on foreign affairs.

CONSTABLE: Well, the focus really came from the moment I decided to take the Foreign Service exam. In those days it was the old exam, three and a half days, and I was just totally unprepared for that.

So after graduation I went to summer school right here at Georgetown, where they ran a ten-week preparatory course for the written exam and tried to fill in great chunks, the gaps in my own preparation: economics and history. At that point I became much more interested in the process and began to learn a lot about foreign affairs and diplomatic history as part of my preparation for the areas where I had very little information, experience before.

Q: When did you enter the Foreign Service?

CONSTABLE: Not until January of '57, because after that summer in Georgetown and taking the written Foreign Service exam (you may remember it was a period when there

was no recruitment going on, a period of two or three years) I went in the Army. I was drafted in the Army and spent two years in the Army.

As I was coming out of the Army, I was really out of touch with Washington and what was going on in the Foreign Service, and I assumed that there was still a long waiting period. I had not taken the oral exam in any event. So I applied for graduate school and was accepted. At the end of the first semester at SAIS, I was called for the oral exam. That was the moment (it started really probably a year before) they started recruiting very heavily.

Q: This was about 1955? I know I came in, in July of '55, and we were the first class. In fact they called it Class Number One, the first one they got together.

CONSTABLE: Well, I was just getting out of the Army a couple of months after that, and I started at graduate school. In early '56 I took the oral exam. And when I passed it, they said, “Well, come right in.” They wanted me right away because they were doing this expanded recruitment. I had just accepted a job. I was bored with graduate school, frankly, and I had accepted a job on the Hill and felt obligated to stay for a year. So then I didn't come in until early '57, although I could have come in earlier.

Q: We talked just a minute about the Hill. What were you doing on the Hill?

CONSTABLE: In those days Senators' staffs were really quite small. I worked on the staff of a Senator from Maine, Paine of Maine. My title was Research Assistant, but I did the functions that are now done by a Legislative Assistant. I handled all his work in a number of areas. I did all the foreign policy things. He was particularly interested in foreign trade and textiles. And then I did work on his behalf on the Banking and Currency Committee, which had a Housing Subcommittee that he was a member of. He was very interested in public housing issues at that time. So I did kind of the whole range of legislative activities for a Senator.

Q: You were working in the Senate just at the time when the whole McCarthy thing was winding down. Did you get a feel about the attitude within the Senate towards the Foreign Service?

CONSTABLE: Not particularly towards the Foreign Service. McCarthy was still in the Senate at that time, although he was a much diminished figure. One saw him on the floor, and he was obviously an ill man and a broken man. But there were still a number of very outspoken, Right Wing, Republican Senators: Welthur and Capehart and Jennings, who were on the rabid Right. Their foreign policy views were arch conservative, in fact radical conservative I would call them. So that was still very much a part of the political scene at that time. I don't recall getting a feel about Senators' views on the Foreign Service, but I certainly did experience first-hand this very reactionary view against any kind of internationalism and the Red scare.

Q: How about within the senatorial staff workers?

CONSTABLE: I did not sense that particularly. Now, my Senator was not on the Foreign Relations Committee, so I was not working primarily or full-time on foreign policy issues.

Q: You came in then in '57?

CONSTABLE: Early '57, end of January.

Q: How big was your class?

CONSTABLE: About 32, I think.

Q: I wonder if you could characterize it?

CONSTABLE: Well, it very much reflected the effort to broaden the recruiting base, at least geographically, not that we had a lot of minorities. There were four women in the

class, but there were no Blacks or Hispanics. That part of the broadening was to come later. But the geographic broadening was in full swing.

The class came from all over the country. A few people who were just fresh out of college, several others who had been around awhile doing various things, either working or graduate school. Most had, most of the men, anyway, had military experience.

There were three or four in the class who had already spent some time working in the department, had come into IR as civil servants, spent a year or two and then gotten themselves somehow transferred into the Foreign Service and were in this class also.

I would say that it was probably an average group, and by and large it did not particularly distinguish itself. By the time we hit the middle ranks, probably half the class was gone for one reason or another.

Q: This might be a little difficult, it's hard to recreate the past, but was there a spirit at the time of the United States having a mission, or was this the job?

CONSTABLE: I would say that was very much mixed. I think some people came to this with the sense of mission, and others came to it as a job. The latter ones were probably the ones who peeled off first, fastest. When they got their Foreign Service experience stamping visas in Tijuana they decided this wasn't even a good job, and off they went into something else.

Q: Your first two posts, because we're going to concentrate more on your senior times, but first was Vigo, Spain, from 1959 to '61, and then you were in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, from '61 to '64 as a Political Officer. What was your impression of your first post in Vigo?

CONSTABLE: Well, it was a very isolated thing — you might as well have been in the Third World somewhere. Spain had still not come out of the Civil War and World War II

experience. They were desperately poor, and economic recovery had not really begun. It was just in its initial steps and was not even evident out in the provinces.

We had a two-man post there, which was closed three or four years later (probably should have been closed earlier). There wasn't an awful lot to do, frankly. The advantage of the post, from a personal point of view, was its isolation and that there were very few English-speaking people about. Spaniards didn't speak English, so I really learned Spanish there. I might have done that somewhere else where I could have been more... I got some reporting experience and that kind of thing. I don't suppose the reports were ever read by anybody, but at least I learned how to write them.

Q: Then in Tegucigalpa as a Political Officer, was this a different experience?

CONSTABLE: Oh, indeed it was. It was a particularly interesting time in Honduras. It was the Alliance for Progress period, rather intense US interest in Latin America.

An elected government was coming to the close of its term. It was the first elected government that Honduras had had in donkey years or maybe ever, I can't quite remember now. And we were very hopeful that there could be a peaceful transition to a second elected government and begin to establish some roots for democratic institutions in Honduras.

In the event, that did not happen, and there was a military coup in late '63. One of a series of coups in Latin America that put the finish to the political side of the Alliance for Progress and our hope that we could somehow foster democratic institutions in Latin America over the short term. That's something we've only come back to in recent years. For about 20 years, that was just a...

Q: How did you react, or the embassy react, during the coup period?

CONSTABLE: We did all the things that we could think to do to try to encourage this transition via another democratic election. We made it very clear to everyone that that's what we wanted to see happen in Honduras.

It became evident in the months prior to the elections that there was a coup fever abroad. One of the political parties, the conservative party, was encouraging the military to undertake a coup. The ruling party itself was somewhat split over the question of succession. And the man who won the party nomination was not universally liked, even in his own party. So there was a tremendous amount of factionalism, which provided a base for a coup, because the political fabric was so sundered there.

We did what we could through our representations to the parties, to the military, to the friends of the military who would drop in to the embassy and say, “Gee, doesn't the United States want to see a coup here?”.

Part of the background to all this was what was going on in Cuba and Fidel Castro's efforts to export his own revolution through Central America and Latin America, generally. And that provided for the US government a certain degree of pause.

It is possible that we were not as forceful as we should have been in batting down any suggestions of coups, although all the representations that the Ambassador made that I was involved in it were really quite, quite strong.

Q: Who was the Ambassador, Chuck Burrows?

CONSTABLE: Yes, he's now dead.

Through the department we got the OAS to send an election observer team down to Honduras to verify that the election procedures were all in order, that the registration process was a clean one, that the balloting procedures set up by the government were adequate.

What we had hoped was that team would stay in Honduras through the elections and, as an international presence, certify that the elections had been honest and try to pull away a potential rationale for the military to make a coup.

That may, in fact, have speeded up the timetable for a coup, because the military moved just before the elections were held so that there could be no question of their overthrowing someone who was popularly elected.

Q: I realize that you were a relatively junior officer at the time, but did you have a feeling then that either the CIA or the military was not really fully on board with this policy, because, again, we were looking at Cuba. Cuba was a major preoccupation.

CONSTABLE: I have no reason to believe that any element in the US government was actively supporting a coup.

There were, as you note, varying degrees of enthusiasm for the democratic process. In certain parts of the government the primary concern was resistance or opposition to Cuba and to Fidel. And that, obviously, colored certain views.

After the coup, some of these views came out in a clearer way. The Administration's reaction to the coup was to recall the Ambassador, suspend economic and military assistance. There were a number of voices on the country team who were outspokenly opposed to that and thought we should simply get on with the job of dealing with the man who was a committed anti-Communist.

Q: How did you feel about the Foreign Service by this time after having two posts? Sounds like you'd been in an exciting place.

CONSTABLE: Yes, I liked it a lot. I liked it a lot. I was really enjoying myself, particularly this second post, Honduras, and it was an ideal job for a junior officer. It was a small

embassy, a small political section. I had a boss whose Spanish (he was a Wristonee) was not very good, so I really got the Wristonee section in many ways.

Q: I might add, for those reading, the Wriston Program was one which brought basically civil servants who had been stationed in Washington in the State Department into the Foreign Service. Often these did not have the same training or experience at the level they came in that would be expected of a Foreign Service officer. They were called Wristonees. You came back to the State Department in '64, and you spent about a year in Personnel?

CONSTABLE: Yes, a little over a year.

Q: And then you became a Staff Assistant from '65 to '67. Where were you staff-assisting?

CONSTABLE: In the Near East-South Asia Bureau. I wanted to make a switch at that point from Latin American Affairs. Not that I had anything particular against service in Latin America, but the word around at that time was once you got into that you never got out. I wanted to experience something else.

Q: I'd like to ask you how you felt, because we are pretty much contemporaries, and the word was that Latin America was somehow second rate, as opposed to exciting things in Eastern Europe or Africa at the time, or the Near East, or the Far East, and Western Europe was more for the sophisticates.

CONSTABLE: Right. Never made that float.

Q: But did you feel somewhat of this?

CONSTABLE: Oh, very definitely. There was definitely a feeling in the department that ARA was a second rate bureau and had second rate, retired people. The bureau itself was trying to do something about that. A lot of very able, younger people came into the bureau about that time, and, obviously, their intention was to hang onto them. I just didn't want to

get set in that mold for the rest of my career. It seemed to me there was a big world out there, and I was very young and new, and I wanted to see more of it.

Q: Well, what sort of work were you doing as a Staff Assistant and who were you working for?

CONSTABLE: I had been recruited for the job by Phillips Talbot, who was a political appointee. Just about the time I came on board, he was on his way out as Ambassador to Greece. Raymond Hare replaced him as Assistant Secretary.

Now, Hare didn't know me and hadn't recruited me, and I had no experience at all in Near East-South Asia. I think he had his doubts about whether I could do this.

Well, you know what a Staff Assistant's work is. You handle all of the paper that flows in and out of the bureau that needs the attention of the Assistant Secretary or the Deputy Assistant Secretaries.

So you play a very important role in rationing his time, and you are one of the important interfaces between the bureau and the Seventh Floor, the Secretary's office and the Under Secretary's. If you're doing the job right, you make sure that that interface is operating effectively and that the bureau is serving the needs of the Secretary and his principal deputies.

Q: Speaking of effectiveness, looking back now, how did you evaluate Raymond Hare as an operator within the Washington system?

CONSTABLE: Well, I thought he was very good. This was really at the end of his career. He had been Ambassador in a number of places, had been Director General of the Foreign Service. I thought he was superb.

He felt very keenly that the Seventh Floor and Secretary Rusk's time was taken up almost exclusively by the Vietnam War. And so he was very, very careful and solicitous

of the Secretary's time, and did what he could to keep problems from impinging on the Secretary's preoccupations with Vietnam.

Hare was a man of such stature in the service and in Washington that he wasn't a man who had to barge around with elbows flying, because people respected him and knew him. He had a long and very distinguished career.

Q: Did you feel any of the pressures or observe any of, probably the most effective of the various ethnic lobbies, the Israeli lobby?

CONSTABLE: Oh, sure. Yes, I was very conscious of that.

Q: How did one deal with this and yet maintain a broad-based foreign policy in that area?

CONSTABLE: The bureau may have, over the long term, suffered for this, but the bureau's view was that dealing with the lobby that represented Israel's supporters was essentially a political job for another level. This was a job for the Secretary, for the President, for the Congress, and the bureau's job was to serve up to the Secretary and the President recommendations that did not really take that into account.

Now, inevitably, some knowledge of the force and strength and positions of an important lobby have to affect to some degree the way you frame issues. But NEA resisted that very hard, and hence became known to the lobby and to the lobby's supporters as pro-Arab, which I think was always a canard against NEA. But it reflected an effort to step back one and not be influenced by the lobby.

Q: Well, did you feel that? Here you were, in some ways, in a good position. You came up really from more the Latin-type atmosphere, so you weren't committed within the bureau to be either an Arabist or an Israeliist or something. Did you feel that there were competing forces fighting within the bureau, or were the Arabists vehement against Israel? How did you see this view at that time?

CONSTABLE: I don't think so. I don't think it broke down quite that way, that there was a pro-Israeli group or a pro-Arab group. There was a strong tradition in the bureau that we had important interests with Arab countries, which were not very well known in the United States and had no particular resonance in any of our domestic concerns, and that there was a job to be done to maintain relationships with them, and that our relationships with Israel had their own particular momentum and rationale, and that those were important to protect, too. But the bureau's job was to find ways to do that, that would not impinge upon our ability to maintain relationships with an important set of countries in the Arab world.

Q: What attracted you? You obviously applied and took Hindi, Urdu training from 1967 to '68. Why there? What were you getting about the subcontinent? Because NEA seemed so concentrated on the Arab-Israeli problem that one always suspects that the subcontinent doesn't quite get the attention maybe.

CONSTABLE: It often seems like that, because there is so much focus on the Arab-Israeli dispute, but there are a lot of people in the bureau who are dedicated full-time to the South Asian problems.

I'd only been in the bureau about two days when war broke out between India and Pakistan, the '65 War. And so, inevitably, I got involved in (just in reading as papers crossed my desk) a lot about the subcontinent and got interested in it. I had done reading on my own about India and Pakistan, which I found interesting before.

One of the things I had had in mind when I came over to NEA as Staff Assistant was that I might go on to some posting in South Asia. As I looked around, I realized there were a lot of people interested in it at that time, probably more so then than is the case now, and that the sure route to getting an assignment as a Political Officer in South Asia was to take the language training.

Q: Speaking of the '65 War, did you have any feel at that time within the bureau... How did the people within the bureau feel about the war? Were they siding with India or Pakistan or saying, "Oh, my God, a plague on both your houses?" What did you feel that the attitude was?

CONSTABLE: Some of this may be retrospective reflection, really, rather than feelings I had at the time, because I was so green and probably wasn't sensitive to all the nuances at the time.

Certainly overall in US policy there has been a bias towards Pakistan, with some fluctuations in that occasionally towards India. Now a number of people who worked on these problems personally felt that the kind of policy that had been first constructed by John Foster Dulles of including Pakistan in CENTO and a bilateral commitment to Pakistan's security was a mistake, that India was the big cheese in South Asia and we should have cast our lot with India. So there were many people who felt that at the bureaucratic level, at the lower levels in the Foreign Service.

But at the policy level, by and large, it remained rather consistent with what Henry Kissinger came to call a tilt towards Pakistan, partially for strategic reasons and, secondarily, because India never wanted to have the kind of relationship that we would have sought as a substitute for the relationship we had with Pakistan.

Q: I also think that there was almost a visceral feeling that the Indians got on our nerves.

CONSTABLE: Well, you had Krishna Menon running around, and he certainly did get on everybody's nerves.

Q: Krishna Menon was the Minister of Defense at the time and a very outspoken anti-American.

CONSTABLE: He enjoyed nothing more than twisting our tail in as nasty a way as he could think to do.

Q: Until he got his comeuppance.

CONSTABLE: That's right. But it was deeper than that. It involved our view of the Soviet Union, our view of China, India's view of those countries, views of the Third World. There were a whole series of issues in which we and India simply did not view things through the same prism.

Q: I have you going to Lahore from 1968 to '71. What were you doing there?

CONSTABLE: We had a consulate general there, and I was the Political Officer on the consulate staff and also the Deputy Principal Officer. The fun part of what I did was the political side. Lahore is located in the Punjab, and the Punjab is really the major province in Pakistan.

Q: Lahore is very close to the Khyber Pass and that area.

CONSTABLE: No, it's really quite south of that. It's right next to the Indian border, about 20 miles from the Indian border in the heart of the Punjab. The Punjab is the most populous province in what is now Pakistan, so it was a key political center. Islamabad was a brand new, artificial capitol, so the embassy was really rather isolated. They didn't have many people up there to talk to.

Q: They'd just moved up from Karachi.

CONSTABLE: They'd just moved up from Karachi, so they were way off in an isolated hinterland. In that particular period, I think the political work done by the consulates was especially important because it was very hard for Islamabad to stay in touch.

Q: What was the situation in Pakistan in this period?

CONSTABLE: Field Marshal Ayub had been President for ten years in a rather authoritarian government, which he characterized as democratic. But the election process was a contentious one in the indirect election process, in which there were real constraints on the opposition. His leading opponent at the time that I arrived in Pakistan was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in West Pakistan and then Mujib in East Pakistan.

Everybody thought that Ayub's government was quite stable, but there were some things going on underneath the surface that erupted shortly after I reached Lahore. Some of these were fallouts from the '65 War, which was something of a psychological disaster, a political disaster for Pakistan and for the leadership in Pakistan.

It was after that war that Bhutto broke with Ayub. Bhutto himself may have been as responsible as anybody for the major error that Pakistan made in starting that war, goading Ayub into doing it. But he managed to walk away from it, dropping all of the blame on Ayub, and he himself came out rather clean in a bit of an heroic posture, which he then used to exploit against Ayub.

The process of street demonstrations started in Pakistan. The most important ones were in Lahore and in Dacca in East Pakistan. Eventually, after three or four months of this, they brought Ayub down in a military coup and led to another whole new process, which ended with the separation of East Pakistan and the war with India in '71.

Q: How did we see the situation, as you saw our operations there, the political thing?

CONSTABLE: We had a political Ambassador at the time, a very fine man.

Q: Joseph S. Farland?

CONSTABLE: No, at first in '68 it was Benjamin Oehlert. He felt very strongly that his mission there was to support Ayub. Now I think others would have defined our relationship with Pakistan as the thing that we wanted to preserve and promote in some way. But he interpreted this as a commitment to an individual, to the then-President Ayub. So he was increasingly distressed as Ayub was weakened and eventually brought down. I think others of us tended to see that not so much as tragedy, the end of Ayub.But other problems that came in the wake of that were serious problems: the divisions between East and West Pakistan, which eventually led to the secession and the war with India, but that our policy should not have been hinged on one man. Not that there were serious consequences of that, because, as in so many situations where a leader is brought down by the will of his own people, the revolt of his own people, there was very little we could do about it.

Q: You were now in the Nixon Administration.

CONSTABLE: '68 was the end of the Johnson Administration. Oehlert had been sent there by Johnson. He used to say that Johnson had told him when he went out there to take care of Ayub.

Q: I think Ayub had given him quite a welcome as Vice President at one time.

CONSTABLE: Yes, Americans were...

Q: Camel driver [?]

CONSTABLE: Yes, exactly. Americans were very fond of Ayub. Ayub was quite a distinguished-looking person, spoke forcefully, stood ramrod straight, and spoke a language that was music to the ears of American political leaders. He was anti-Soviet and a good military type.

Q: I'm a little confused. Ayub came down when?

CONSTABLE: Early '69.

Q: When did the war come about that separated Bangladesh?

CONSTABLE: Not until '71. But it all flowed from this event as the political life opened up with the collapse of Ayub, even though there was a martial law administration.

The martial law administration was regarded as a rather weak one. General Yahya promised political reforms and democratic elections, which indeed were held in '70. And they were free and fair, as nearly as anybody could tell.

But the results were a political disaster, because Mujib, the Awami League, won a massive victory in East Pakistan. I think they won all the seats but one.

And Bhutto emerged as the largest vote-getter in West Pakistan, although he probably would not have had a majority. I can't recall the figures now, but anyway he was clearly the leading political figure in West Pakistan.

A struggle for dominance of the center in Islamabad by the Awami League began. The West Pakistanis had always dominated the central government. The East Pakistanis had regarded this as disadvantageous to them. By winning a majority, Mujib had had a majority for the center. But there was great consternation in West Pakistan, because, for the first time in the brief history of that country, the West Pakistanis were going to have to subsidize the East. In the past, it had worked the other way.

Q: Here you are in Lahore, you're in West Pakistan. In the first place, how did you view Bhutto, you, personally, but also the consulate general? You were reporting on this man.

CONSTABLE: I think, with some suspicion. I will say that we did not realize how popular Bhutto had become out in the boondocks, how forcefully his message had been received by peasants who were going to vote for the first time. To some extent we accepted the

view that old feudal patterns would still prevail when the votes were finally counted, that even though elections were ostensibly fair, the influence of landlords over their tenants would still be very strong in the polling place.

As it turned out, that wasn't true at all. They completely ignored the views of the landlords and voted for Bhutto as a political revolutionary who was going to change land tenure systems, abolish feudalism, abolish the great industrialists who controlled so much of the wealth of the country. He campaigned with a revolutionary message, and it took. He won a stunning victory in the Punjab.

Q: We had looked upon Pakistan as being a rather firm ally to us and our anti-Soviet stance. Was there the feeling that here was somebody who would not be as strong? Were we doing anything maybe not to change the thing at the time?

CONSTABLE: No. There was a lot of concern about Bhutto being too opportunistic, too antagonistic to India, perhaps a little bit too slippery. But I don't think there was fundamental concern that he would lead Pakistan away from a relationship with the United States that we valued. The concern about him was not so much in foreign policy terms but in the quality of the man.

Q: Was there any feeling of almost localitis — there you were sitting in a major post in West Pakistan, and things were happening in Dacca, in Bangladesh, which was Bengali, which was almost a thousand miles on the other side of..., separated — that there were completely different dynamics over there? Was there much interaction between our two posts or not?

CONSTABLE: There was a lot, and I credit the embassy for being very open this way. Even though initially when I was first there and there was agitation against Ayub, Ambassador Oehlert was less than pleased about the kind of reporting that was coming from the consulates, because we were predicting that Ayub would go under.

Oehlert didn't see it that way and really didn't like that going to Washington. But he didn't do anything to stop it, to his credit. He came down and talked to us and tried to argue his case with us, but he didn't interfere with the reporting. Subsequently, when we changed Ambassadors and the martial law regime...

Q: The new Ambassador was Joseph S. Farland.

CONSTABLE: There was a tremendous amount of interaction between the consulates and the embassy. There was a regular process of having Political Officers and principal officers from the constituent posts go up to Islamabad, meet with the country team and thrash through the issues. All the reporting from the consulates was shared with each other, so that we had full access to what they were saying from Dacca, what that point of view was. I thought that part of the operation was very good, it was really excellent.

It wasn't until '71, when Yahya ordered a military crackdown in East Pakistan, that the harmony within the country team began to fly apart, because the perspective from Dacca became dramatically different from the view of the embassy.

Q: Were you there at the time?

CONSTABLE: Yes. The crackdown started in March of '71. I left the post in May of '71 and then came back to Washington on the Pakistan desk, so I was still working on it.

Q: Who was our Consul General?

CONSTABLE: At the time of the crackdown it was Arch Blood. And he stayed sometime into the summer, I think.

Q: Was there the feeling that gee, he's coming from where you were or something, he's gone too local or not, or is it...?

CONSTABLE: I think they felt that in the embassy. And I think they felt that back in Washington, that he had taken, that the consulate and the reporting had taken too pro-Bengali a view, which I don't quite agree with. They felt very strongly that what the Pakistanis were doing, one, would be unsuccessful, would ruin the country and therefore was not in the US interest and, two, that it was barbaric, and they were really shocked by what was happening there.

Q: It was very brutal putdown.

CONSTABLE: It was terrible.

Q: I've seen pictures of people being killed and being beheaded in the streets. Now, this was a peculiar country anyway, two parts divided by a thousand miles by essentially a hostile country.

CONSTABLE: Held together by an airline.

Q: Which flew over hostile territory. Was there the feeling that the United States should do everything they can (I'm talking about the people you were dealing with), that we really have to hold this thing together, or saying, you know, this is going to go, this is never going to hold?

CONSTABLE: Views were really quite different, and they operated on a number of levels. I'm not sure the different levels entirely understood the views of the other levels and why they were held the way they were.

But the time was 1971, and we were in a period of domestic uproar over Vietnam and Cambodia, a feeling that the United States was somehow over-committed around the world, and that we were sticking our nose into things and we shouldn't be, and that we should be in a period of retraction, get out of Vietnam and bury our heads in the sand. Some of this affected our people around the world.

Prior to the actual crackdown, when there was a period of negotiation going on between politicians in East and West Pakistan, the embassy's view generally was that we should stay out of this, let them settle their own hash, and that no vital American interests were involved in this. We argued from Lahore that it wouldn't cost much for us to involve ourselves in a low-level way.

Q: Doing what?

CONSTABLE: Talking to leaders on both sides to see if there was any kind of a mediation that might help them to get to a political settlement and reach agreement on a continuation of a united Pakistan, but with some modifications for greater autonomy for the provinces, some formula like that. Formulas which were being discussed and which came close to success, but didn't quite make it.

But the embassy and indeed the department didn't accept that view. And even in East Pakistan, our people felt that we should just keep our nose out of this.

I think, in retrospect, we should have had our nose in it, because once the separation became a serious problem and there was a military crackdown, there was a furor in the Congress.

Henry Kissinger's view of this was not so much that a united Pakistan was important to us, but that we had very important incipient relations with China that were involved in what happened to Pakistan.

Pakistan was China's oldest and closet friend. They were one of the first to recognize the Communist regime and had developed a very close relationship with China. That was important to China.

Henry Kissinger saw what was important to China as being important to us if we were going to develop any kind of relationship with China. We had to persuade the Chinese that

we understood their interests and could support some of their interests elsewhere in the world, and that there would be a value in having a relationship with us.

But this was not understood in the department, because it was not articulated at all. Henry was running his own Pakistan policy over in the White House.

Q: He was at that time our National Security Advisor.

CONSTABLE: He was the NSC Advisor and Bill Rogers was Secretary of State. He was feeling this constant heat from the Hill and from the press: Why are we supporting Pakistan? Why haven't we cut off all arms shipments to them? Why haven't we cut off all assistance to them? Here they are butchering Bengalis in Dacca, and you're carrying on. India, in any event, is the important country in South Asia. They're opposed to what's happening in Pakistan and yet we're kicking them in the groin. Why are we doing these things?

Henry was not in a position at that point, because up until August he hadn't even visited China, they were just trying to get something...

Q: So behind the scenes there was this using Pakistan in order to get us into China, and actually it did work that way.

CONSTABLE: It did work that way, yes. None of us could understand what the hell was going on really. Why was Henry so determined to tilt towards Pakistan?

Q: This was a very famous phrase, wasn't it?

CONSTABLE: Yes, a phrase he used in an NSC meeting that was then leaked to the press.

Q: That we were going to tilt towards Pakistan and yet we had, you might say, bigger fish to fry. But it still poisons the well as far as India's concerned today.

CONSTABLE: To some extent I suppose it does.

Q: At least it's always there.

CONSTABLE: On that level you had a strategic concern about the breakup of Pakistan. Not so much for what the breakup per se was going to do to Pakistan or to our interests, it was the way it happened, and how it happened, and how could this be managed so that what Nixon and Kissinger were trying to do with China would not be damaged.

And I must say they handled it brilliantly. They tilted a bit towards Pakistan. We weren't shipping them any arms of any consequence, and before the war broke out we really had closed the pipeline down entirely.

We made an attempt to see if there was any way to mediate between Yahya and Mujib, who was in jail in Calcutta. That collapsed in the course of the months that we were trying to do it, to see if there could be a peaceful resolution.

When that was impossible, we tried to get the Indians to hold back and not invade East Pakistan. That was not successful. As anyone could have foreseen, the Indians cleaned up East Pakistan fairly quickly and liberated Bangladesh. The issue then was would they invade West Pakistan.

I don't know to this day what the Indian intentions were. There was an intelligence report floating around that there had been a Cabinet discussion of launching an attack on Pakistan and ending the threat from the Pakistanis once and for all.

Henry Kissinger seized on this and later claimed that he was convinced that that was the intention of the Indian government. I think it wasn't so clear. But he then went into a kind of diplomatic tour de force of warning the Indians off from this, sending the Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal...

Q: The Enterprise being our nuclear carrier.

CONSTABLE: And also (although I'm not sure of this) warning the Soviets against any further Indian attacks against Pakistan. The upshot was a cease fire and the end of the war.

Now, all of this, I'm convinced, was done for the purpose of assuring the Chinese that we took their interests in South Asia seriously.

After the war, Shulzberger went to China. (He was a pundit for The New York Times.) He went to China, and he also visited in Pakistan.

In the meantime, the Yahya government, defeated by India, collapsed and Bhutto came into power in Pakistan.

But Shulzberger did a column in The New York Times, which I thought was quite fascinating. Bhutto told Shulzberger that the United States saved Pakistan by warning the Indians off from an attack against the West. And how did he know this? The Chinese told him. The article doesn't say how the Chinese knew, but one suspects that Henry told them.

So it was a very brilliantly constructed policy. But it was a hidden-hand kind of policy, and it was very difficult for the people who were working in the vineyards to understand what was going on and why, and why the moves were constructed the way they were. And not just difficult for us, it was difficult for the Congress and for the press because none of this was articulated, or could be articulated. It would have been blown out of the water.

Q: You were back in Washington on the desk by this time. You were...

CONSTABLE: Just in the dark. We went on doing our business. We ran from our office the effort to do a mediation between Yahya and Mujib. We wrote the telegrams on that,

the instructions and so on. But we didn't understand how they fit into a larger view. And we really didn't understand very well why there was such a pronounced tilt towards Pakistan.

Q: That's fascinating. Well, you came back in spring of '71, and you were then, I suppose, probably immediately co-opted onto the desk, weren't you?

CONSTABLE: Right, I'd come back to go on the desk.

Q: The desk was India-Pakistan desk?

CONSTABLE: There were two different offices: an India-Nepal-Sri Lanka office and a Pakistan-Afghanistan office. Subsequently, that became Pakistan-Afghanistan-Bangladesh office.

Q: From that vantage point, you were there from '71 to '72, how did you see the threat of the Soviet Union in that area, including Afghanistan?

CONSTABLE: In that period we saw it as not terribly great. The one element in the Soviet threat that was important to us was the Soviet relationship with India. That was formalized in the summer of '71 in a friendship treaty. Not that anybody thought that India was going to go Communist or become a handmaiden for the Soviets, but we didn't like the relationship with the Soviets. And we didn't like it when they formalized that in a treaty relationship. And, in general, we didn't like lots of elements of Indian foreign policy that seemed to us to be too close to the Soviets.

Q: If I recall, at the time India was not... Part of this time I was in Saigon and the Indians were part of the ICC, International...

CONSTABLE: We didn't like the role they played there I don't believe.

Q: We always felt that at least there were the Poles, the Indians, and the Canadians, and we felt at least we knew where the Poles were. But the Indians pretended to be neutral

and yet they were very pro-Soviet. Did you feel any conflict, internally in the Near East, in dealing with South Asia on the thing? I mean did you have Indianists and Pakistaniists?

CONSTABLE: To some extent we did, yes. Although in '71, people were so appalled by what the Pakistanis were doing in East Pakistan that we all became a little bit anti-Pakistan in that period and a little more pro-India. India got the ten million refugees, and we were sympathetic to that dilemma. But our biggest problem was this different views at different levels, and our inability to comprehend what the rationale was that was driving the Kissinger part of the government, which was in control of policy.

Q: You were at a juncture where one could feel the tremors, the difference between Rogers and Kissinger, too, weren't you?

CONSTABLE: This became a junior feud in terms of military supply policy. After the '65 War when we embargoed arms sales to both India and Pakistan (it was more important in the Pakistan case, because we had been a principal supplier to Pakistan up to that point), we had restored some military sales to Pakistan.

It was a very modest program, and we weren't all that important to them. Certain kinds of spare parts were key, because we had supplied airplanes to them and so on. They had long since turned to China and to international markets as their major suppliers.

But when the trouble started and the crackdown occurred in East Pakistan, there was a huge hue and cry from the Congress and from the press: Why are we supplying any arms to these butchers? And it was a good question.

Rogers wanted to shut down any arms sales to Pakistan. And Kissinger was opposed. This went on for months and months. Rogers ostensibly prevailed and turned off any new sales.

Then there was the issue of the pipeline. He [ROGERS OR KISSINGER?] would say nothing was leaving, then The New York Times would discover some ship had sailed out of Baltimore Harbor loaded with arms for Pakistan. This was a lesson to me on how hard it is to control something within our government.

Nevertheless, the policy still allowed for certain limited sales. Rogers kept driving at this, and driving at this, and driving at this, trying to get this shut down. And Henry kept resisting, and resisting, and resisting. We were caught in the middle and not comprehending why the resistance was so great from the White House.

So I think the most important service that I did to Rogers and to Joe Sisco, who was then Assistant Secretary, was to figure out some tricky little way that we could close down the remaining things that we were shipping to Pakistan without getting the Pakistanis too mad at us.

Q: How did you do this?

CONSTABLE: Oh, I can't remember. It was a letter that I think Rogers sent to Yahya explaining why we had to do this and trying to put the best light on it. It was a drafting exercise, essentially, but the Pakistanis took it in good grace. What we were cutting off at that point was very marginal. So we were able to finally say, and it satisfied Rogers, that we were not shipping any more military equipment to Pakistan.

Q: You'll have to remind me on the dates. When did Nixon make the announcement that he'd gone over to China?

CONSTABLE: That Kissinger had gone. You see, Kissinger went in August of '71. He flew secretly from Pakistan to Beijing. Nobody knew he'd done it until he got back and announced it a few days later, and at that time announced that Nixon would be going

in January. Now if we hadn't been so dense, it was at that point that we should have understood a little bit better exactly what...

Q: I was going to ask, the light bulb did not really go on?

CONSTABLE: The light bulb went on in a sense, but I don't think any of us really quite got our arms around the whole rationale that Kissinger felt, and Nixon felt, it was important to somehow satisfy Pakistan's Chinese interest in Pakistan through this period. I don't think we saw all of that — the little maneuvers that were never explained, the tilt towards Pakistan. Some elements of it still were hard to rationalize during this period.

Q: Also, isn't there a certain amount of style, at least from what I've heard, that Henry Kissinger enjoyed doing this thing? I mean it was a constant thing.

CONSTABLE: Yes, I suppose. Although I think he really did feel that he had to play a hidden hand here, while temperamentally that was his inclination anyway. But I think in this instance he was right, that to have stated the rationale, revealed the rationale, he'd have been blown right out of the water. And Nixon maybe would never have gotten to China. It would have been seen in the Congress and in the press as a very high price to pay for a toast in the Great Hall of the People. It was a very difficult policy to get through.

Q: Well then, to move on. We're obviously going to come back to this area. You went to the War College from 1972 to '73. In this time, without going into all the particulars, did you notice a difference in attitude between the military men above the Colonel level, who were on their way up? Did they understand the State Department and how we operated, diplomatic things? I'm saying this in context of the misunderstanding we've had in recent weeks about the diplomatic role in our little invasion into Panama, which was militarily fairly well done, diplomatically an absolute disaster. I'm just thinking about your view of the military mind and the State Department mind.

CONSTABLE: There were very pronounced and sharp differences. The military population in the War College, by and large, were people who had no experience of any kind in the international arena. They might have served in Germany as part of forces committed under NATO, but unless they had done staff work in some international organization or the JCS, I think they had a very limited world view.

They tended to be rather hawkish, quite defensive about Vietnam at that time, disturbed by the way Vietnam was ending, understandably. State Department people were quite dovish in that period. Therefore, their views and the views of the military at the War College were quite divergent on a lot of foreign policy issues.

The dialogue was not always (sometimes it was) a terribly sophisticated one, because the background that the military people brought to the discussion was too limited.

This was a real difference that I noticed later in my career, particularly when I started doing the peacekeeping thing in the Middle East, that American officers who reached the Colonel level very often are there with no experience at all in any kind of international environment or affairs. Whereas those in the British Army, Norwegians, Europeans, generally, had had quite a different experience and arrive at the Colonel level with a much greater degree of sophistication about foreign affairs than Americans do.

Q: I think this is true. Also, most Foreign Service officers, certainly of our generation, have had a good, solid injection of military, albeit maybe at the enlisted ranks, but they have served in the military and have some idea of the military. Whereas the American military just does not have, generally, any feel, and it causes real problems in having dialogues I think.

CONSTABLE: That is true, that is true. I don't know quite how this played out in the example you just cited of Panama and the diplomatic snafus in Panama, but the one thing that always struck me about the military is they accept, in principle and fervently,

the notion of civilian command, that their orders come from a civilian chain: the President, Secretary of Defense, and so on.

For Foreign Service officers, Ambassadors dealing with military on the country team, or Deputy Assistant Secretaries or Assistant Secretaries dealing with people in the Pentagon, it's a tremendous advantage that they understand civilian authority and accept it. Civilians don't always know how to use that and how to convey that to the military.

I had a friend who always said that if you want to really convey something to the military, put it in writing, because they not only respect civilian authority, but they respect the written word.

Q: We have a tendency to give our instructions almost by indirection.

CONSTABLE: Yes, indeed, we're always clear.

Q: This is the diplomatic style. Well now, you came right back. You certainly had your concentration in the area we're talking about, the subcontinent. After the War College, I have you from '73 to '76 as the office Director for Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. What was the situation there at that time, the '73 to '76 period? The Nixon Administration, Vietnam, fell in that period, and the United States was reeling a bit from world commitments.

CONSTABLE: Yes, indeed, indeed. Things were settling down in South Asia after the '71 War. West Pakistan seemed to be pulling itself together under Bhutto's leadership, and with a good deal of support from us. In Bangladesh, the worst disasters were being avoided, again with massive assistance from the US, primarily in food.

An interesting political change in East Pakistan, in Bangladesh, was occurring, which in some ways made things easier. After the flush of liberation, the more natural concerns began to play themselves out, and the Bengalis began to resist Indian influence. One way

for them to do this was to reconcile themselves with Pakistan and, through Pakistan, the rest of the Islamic world. And that was very good for Pakistani morale.

In, I think it was '74, Mujib flew from Dacca to Lahore to an Islamic conference meeting with Bhutto. It was a reconciliation, which one could not have expected in such a short time. It was an amazing turnaround. But it was good both for the Bengalis and for the Pakistanis. The Indians were licking their wounds after we had kicked them around in '71, but things were gradually getting better, and some of those wounds were healing.

It was not a period of great activism for US policy in South Asia. Things began to unravel a little bit in Afghanistan in ways that we did not fully understand. The monarchy was abolished, and a member of the King's family declared a republic, and so President Daoub (inaudible). And this was to come back and haunt us later when the King himself was thrown out in the Communist coup. What we understood, but didn't necessarily fully appreciate what the ramifications would be, was that with the abolition of the monarchy went probably the only Afghan institution that was capable of reaching or covering such disparate ethnic and tribal elements in Afghanistan.

Kissinger, by then Secretary of State, continued to have a very warm place in his heart for Pakistan. And we had to deal with, again, one of the aftermath issues from the '71 War.

Secretary Rogers had succeeded, finally, in closing down the military supply relationship. I think all of us who worked on Pakistan issues felt that that was not a suitable policy for us to be pursuing. Not that we wanted to stimulate an arms race in South Asia, but Pakistan was a friend, and that we should open it up a bit, which we succeeded in doing, I think it was in '75.

But at about the same time a new issue loomed on the horizon, which came to dominate our relationships with Pakistan over the next three years — that was Pakistan's nuclear program.

The Indians had in '72 or '73 [1974] exploded a nuclear devise. This was a terrifying thing to the Pakistanis, whose security concerns revolved mostly on what they perceived as a threat from India. For the Indians not only to have an overwhelming advantage in conventional weapons, but to supplement that with a nuclear capability was, indeed, genuinely terrifying to Pakistan.

So Bhutto vowed that they would do whatever they could to duplicate India's capability. I think nobody took that too seriously initially, because Pakistan was not believed to have the resources or scientific capability or financial resources to pull off a program like this. Again, we underestimated them very seriously, because they went at it hammer and tong.

By various feats of chicanery and some smart diplomacy, they set into train a two-pronged program: one, to reach a nuclear explosive capability by way of reprocessing plutonium and, two, by uranium enrichment.

The plutonium reprocessing plan was well known, because that was dependent on assistance from the French. The French had agreed to build a plutonium reprocessing plant in Pakistan.

We became concerned about that capability. There was no real reason to reprocess plutonium in Pakistan except for weapons capability. Pakistan had a reactor in Karachi, a Canadian-built reactor, which would produce plutonium to [?], then had to be reprocessed in order to be useful in building the bomb.

So we started working on the Pakistanis, in various diplomatic representations, to cancel that reprocessing program. And we started working on the French.

The Congress got very interested in this issue and passed legislation that would require the US government to cut off assistance to Pakistan, economic and military assistance to

any country that developed a reprocessing capability. So we were in that kind of a bind with the Pakistanis.

The dialogue went on for a couple of years with the Pakistanis and with the French. Ultimately, the French were persuaded that the only rationale for this was for a bomb, a nuclear bomb in Pakistan, and they canceled the contract with the Pakistanis.

In the meantime, under the pressure of the Symington amendment, we were obliged to cut off economic and military assistance to Pakistan. This came later. I'm really getting ahead of myself to when I was in Pakistan, back in Pakistan in '77.

Q: Was there anybody in the State Department saying: After all, if the Indians have got the capability, the Pakistanis certainly need this for stability?

CONSTABLE: I don't think anybody said that they need it or that it was desirable. There were lots of people who said initially: Well, this can't be serious. They may be trying it; they'll never make it. They don't have the capability to do it.

That was certainly, I think, Kissinger's view at the beginning, that this can't be serious. I don't know his innermost thoughts on this, but he didn't like the issue and wished it had never come up, I do know that. There were many arguments about how we should deal with it, but I don't recall anyone ever suggesting that: Oh well, it's Okay.

Q: Was there any way of trying to work on the Indians to do anything, or was the cat out of the bag?

CONSTABLE: Yes, yes, we did. We did. We did, but it was not easy. And, in fact, I felt that the Indian position was just awful on this. They saw us working over the Pakistanis and trying to beat them, the Pakistani program. And their attitude was: Well, we don't concern ourselves with that.

And it was the most cynical sort of policy — of course they were concerned. But they were just happy to have us do all the beating.

We tried it from different directions: Well, we aren't going to get anywhere bilaterally with Pakistan, we need to do this in a South Asian context. We need to get India and Pakistan to have some kind of a mutual standdown. The Pakistanis were willing to entertain that kind of a policy (or so they said). It never got very far, so they were never completely tested on this.

But the Indian view was, and not surprisingly: Well, we're not concerned about Pakistan, we're concerned about China. China's got a nuclear capability and missiles that will reach us, but, by the way, our program is entirely peaceful. But we're not going to make a bilateral standdown deal with Pakistan. If you can get China in it, we might be interested.

Q: Well, in this period, I take it, outside of this issue, relations with India were not particularly warm, close, or proper.

CONSTABLE: No, but they weren't bad. They were a little better than proper. I think, a couple of hard knocks with the Indians... The Indians got a little more realistic about us and wanted to improve relationships. And so, on certain specific issues, we probably made more progress with the Indians at a time when relations on a political level weren't very close or very warm. We did more real business with them than we had previously.

Q: With Bangladesh, was it the view that this was a basket case, or that we do what we can, but this is going to be a minus in whoever tangles with this problem, because of its economic problems?

CONSTABLE: Well, yes, I mean that it was going to cost money. In that sense it was a minus, because there was nothing much to be gained. We had no great strategic interest in Bangladesh, political axes to grind or objectives to promote there. It was a humanitarian

issue, essentially, but on a scale that was important to us. We could not stand back and watch 75 million Bengalis starve, go though that kind of a wretched process.

So we did crank up a very substantial relief and assistance effort there, which continues to this day. Although I must say they've made remarkable progress towards self-sufficiency and food. They're not there, probably not close to it, but they have increased their rice and wheat production enormously over this period. So it's been money well spent.

Henry said, “Bangladesh will be a basket case, but it won't be our basket case.” Of course he was wrong. It has inevitably become ours.

Q: Well then, in 1976 you went to Islamabad in Pakistan as Deputy Chief of Mission. Your Ambassador was...

CONSTABLE: Henry Byroade for the first year and then Arthur Hummel.

Q: So you had two real professionals.

CONSTABLE: Two real professionals. Couldn't have been more different styles, but they were marvelous people.

Q: How did they use you, and how did you see these two men, because these were important people?

CONSTABLE: Well, Byroade was the kind of person who had his own very special way of operating. As far as he was concerned, the DCM ran the embassy and all the housekeeping stuff, took care of morale problems and coordination problems, and all the things that DCMs do.

Byroade had been an Ambassador many times and was not interested in doing any of that stuff any more (if he ever had been, I don't know). His principal concern was his

relationship with the leader of the country. He had done this in Egypt with Nasser, he had done this in Afghanistan with the King, he had done this in the Philippines with Marcos.

He came to Pakistan and the relationship that he concentrated on was his relationship with Bhutto, who was then Prime Minister. And he had a very good relationship with Bhutto. Bhutto liked him a lot. It was sort of an avuncular relationship, because Bhutto respected him, maybe even was a little intimidated by him in a sense.

Byroade was intimidating in the sense one felt, always, that Byroade was a presence, and he was somebody who really had been around, knew a lot, had a very shrewd appreciation of people and their motives, and the way things worked. So he was very successful in Pakistan because of this relationship with Bhutto.

Now shortly after he left, Bhutto went under. The same kind of street demonstrations and agitation that had brought Ayub down came back again to Pakistan's political life and brought Bhutto down.

So when Hummel came, Bhutto was gone. There was again a martial law administration with General Zia. Hummel's style was totally different from Byroade's. It was not as personalized. He did not play it that the key was a one-on-one relationship with the chief of state. He tended to work in what I suppose one would call a more traditional way, working with foreign office people, occasionally seeing the chief of state on a business matter, and so on. I don't know how Hummel might have played it in a different situation. If he'd been there when Bhutto was there, I don't know, he might have done some personal things.

Q: Were we trying also to keep a little bit removed, do you think? I mean, here was a military dictatorship...

CONSTABLE: Yes, our policy at the beginning was that there ought to be a democratic government in Pakistan, there should be elections.

Q: We are talking about the Carter Administration?

CONSTABLE: We are talking about the Carter Administration at that point, so there was that element in it, too, probably. But I also sense (I could be wrong) that this was the way Hummel would do it anyway.

Q: Well now, let's go back to when you first got there and Bhutto was in. How did the embassy view Bhutto? You were getting from Byroade and from others...

CONSTABLE: Very positively. We were disturbed by the nuclear issue. By the time I got to Pakistan, summer of '76, this had moved up to the front rank of our concerns with Pakistan. It was beginning to get publicity.

I had only been there about a month when Kissinger made his farewell visit to Pakistan at the end of the Ford Administration. He had to raise the nuclear issue with Bhutto as the central issue. He didn't want to, but he had to, because the Symington amendment was on the books, and our hand was being forced by the Congress, if for no other reason. Also, in the election campaign, Carter was making an issue of nuclear proliferation. So the heat was on.

But we thought well of Bhutto. Bhutto had done well. He had picked Pakistan up off the floor. In a political sense he had given it back some self-respect. We had our own questions about the way he ran his government. He tended to be a little bit more authoritarian than perhaps he needed to be, or we would have liked, but it was not something that we ever raised as an issue with him. We didn't consider it essentially our business.

And we didn't think his economic policies were very effective. In fact, to the contrary, we thought he'd kind of made a hash on the economic side. But we thought he had been good for Pakistan. And in a foreign policy sense we were very close. So we were happy with

him. He came to believe we weren't. We were disturbed by the nuclear issue, but we didn't really pin that tail on Bhutto, although we might have, because it really was his program.

Q: When did we feel that he felt that we were trying to destabilize him?

CONSTABLE: That came later. He got into trouble. They had elections early the following year, early '77. We were surprised, as was the opposition itself, by the strength of their support that became evident in the early months of the campaign — a great outpouring of dissatisfaction with Bhutto and his government, and support for this rather motley opposition.

They had not expected this themselves. They thought that they could get a few seats and they could do their best with that. But for awhile during the campaign they thought they might even win it.

By the end of the campaign, Bhutto and his people had rallied. And it was our assessment that he would win the elections, but probably with reduced majorities in the Parliament. Apparently what Bhutto was after was a two-thirds majority so he could amend the constitution at will. Exactly what he had in mind we're not quite sure, but we think he probably wanted to strengthen the position of the Prime Minister, or become President again instead of Prime Minister, and maybe set himself up for a more autocratic government.

But to get that two-thirds, either he ordered, or some of his minions did it on their own initiative, rigged the elections in the Punjab. And he won more seats than he probably was entitled to. At least that was our judgement. And certainly that's what the opposition thought, that they had been really cheated. So, this was January of '77, the elections were held.

By February, the opposition was organizing street demonstrations against Bhutto, and they began to grow in size and effectiveness.

One element in this was the Islamic orthodox groups, who were part of the opposition but became very effective in the streets and in organizing street demonstrations against Bhutto, and putting Bhutto, who was himself quite secular, very much on the defensive.

There were silly things that became issues in the election campaign. Later when Bhutto came to Washington on an official visit and was entertained at the White House, Mrs. Bhutto danced with President Ford, and there were pictures in the Pakistani papers. Well, a Muslim woman is not supposed to dance with anybody who isn't her husband, probably not supposed to dance at all, certainly not with a man who's not her husband. And this was that kind of low-blow, but effective, anti-Bhutto, Islamic stuff.

Q: Sounds like one of our campaign people.

We were talking about the relations with Bhutto. I wonder if you could go back over what was happening during the election period, what was our attitude towards the election, and then how did this develop?

CONSTABLE: We liked Bhutto. We had a good relationship with him. We didn't like his economic policies, but he was saying the right thing, that he was going to change these in his second administration. So we were happy about that, that they might get themselves together economically.

We had this developing nuclear issue, but that was no reason for us to favor any change in leadership in Pakistan, because we were convinced that any government was going to be difficult to deal with on the nuclear issue.

Q: And we were talking about your contacts with the opposition.

CONSTABLE: We were in close contact with a broad spectrum of political leadership in Pakistan. One point I was making was that this always caused misunderstandings in a

society like Pakistan's, where their experience with democratic institutions was not very deep.

The opposition itself tended to exaggerate the importance of their contacts with us, and tried to interpret them as meaning that we favored the opposition somehow or that we were unhappy with the government.

The government viewed them with similar alarm, that we were somehow encouraging the opposition, and that by just the very nature of seeing their opponents we were giving them encouragement and undermining the government. And this came back later, after the elections, to haunt us in a sense. Not that I would have changed our way of doing this at all, but it has its risks and costs.

We thought, at the start of the campaign, that Bhutto was an absolute shoe-in during the elections. And we were surprised, as was the opposition, when the campaign was started, how much support the opposition seemed to have. People came out in huge numbers for the opposition rallies at the beginning of the campaign.

This panicked the government, panicked Bhutto initially. They seemed quite demoralized in the early stages of the campaign, but they pulled themselves together.

By the end of the campaign, our assessment was that Bhutto would win, he would have a majority of seats in the Parliament, but perhaps not as great as his present government. Bhutto himself seems to have wanted to get a two-thirds majority, so that he could amend the constitution at will. What he had in mind specifically we were never quite sure, but he may have wanted to strengthen his position over the long-term and maybe even set up a succession for his daughter, who is now the Prime Minister.

Q: Benazir Bhutto.

CONSTABLE: Well, when the votes were counted, he had indeed won. But there was a general feeling that he had won the size of majority that he did by some political skulduggery. And whether this was on his own orders or some overzealous work by some of his minions in the provinces, we don't know.

The consequence was that the opposition had an issue: that there had been cheating in the elections. And they went to the streets to overturn the results of the elections. They, in effect, used the same tactics that Bhutto and other opposition people had used against Ayub — mass street demonstrations, huge outpourings of people that paralyzed the country. This went on, as it had under Ayub, for a period of three or four months.

Bhutto began to look around for a scapegoat, somebody to blame for his troubles, and blame somebody in a way that would enhance his own position. We became that target.

A few months earlier, when Carter was running for President, he published a campaign book in which his only commentary on South Asia was high praise for India (and maybe some criticism of Pakistan, I can't remember), but this was avidly read in Pakistan and interpreted as meaning that the new Administration was anti-Pakistan.

Q: You mention Carter's mother had served, at a very elderly age, as a Peace Corps volunteer in India.

CONSTABLE: That's right, and Pakistanis saw this as a reason why Carter was going to tilt towards India and away from Pakistan. As Bhutto got into trouble and there were street demonstrations, the US government, in a highly visible way as part of its human rights policy and concerns, prohibited the sale of tear gas to Pakistan. This, also, was interpreted as a deliberate attempt to bring Bhutto down, to undercut Bhutto in Pakistan. I don't think that was the intention at all, but that's the way it was seen.

Then Bhutto's supporters began to put together stories, bring stories to him, about American Embassy officers going around talking to opposition leaders and encouraging them in their demonstrations against Bhutto and bad-mouthing Bhutto.

As nearly as we could figure out in the aftermath of all of this, these stories were twisted. Certainly some of the meetings had occurred, but not the content that was ascribed to them by various people. Some of these stories may have been invented by the opposition leaders themselves just to persuade Bhutto that we were against him.

Anyway, that's the kind of intrigue and cross-current that goes on in a country like Pakistan and sometimes catches the US government in its net. Well, the upshot was that after Ambassador Byroade had left, Bhutto, in a speech nationally televised...

Q: You were there as Chief of Mission.

CONSTABLE: Yes, and then at that point I was the Charg#. Bhutto went on national television and, speaking before the Parliament, denounced the United States for attempting to overthrow him. He didn't mention us by name, but it was very clear who he meant. And he cited a number of these stories of contacts between US Embassy officials and opposition people. He cited, and completely distorted, a couple of phone-tapped conversations between embassy officers. It was quite a performance.

So we were Enemy Number One. Bhutto may have believed part of it, but he did this in order to rally his own troops and see if he could discredit the opposition. Well, in those terms, it was a complete failure, complete failure. Of course, we were very upset by this. We didn't like it at all.

Q: How did we respond?

CONSTABLE: We responded in public statements. He made this speech about eight o'clock in the evening, and we all rushed down to the embassy and started firing off

telegrams. Because of the 11-hour time difference, we were able to get stuff into Washington as they were coming into the office in the morning. And they were able to get responses back to us when we returned to the office. So we had a very quick turnaround.

Washington made a public statement denying that we were involved in any way in trying to overthrow Bhutto. We got Secretary Vance to send a message to Bhutto. It was a fairly stern, but conciliatory, message.

The next day when we delivered the message, Bhutto, being a real political rogue and rascal, went out in an open Jeep and drove around through Rawalpindi, and had all his supporters out in the street, and he was waving this letter from Secretary Vance, saying that the Americans had apologized to him. Of course, it wasn't an apology at all, and we then got the department to release the text.

But that's the kind of thing we were going through. We, in the embassy, were feeling rather put upon by all of this and thought that the US ought to take quite a hard line with Bhutto.

I think Vance thought that we should not. He was hearing from the Shah, who was still in power in Iran at that time and was a close friend of Bhutto's and a supporter. The Shah did not want to see Bhutto go under in Pakistan, did not want to see a fundamentalist government come into power in Pakistan, so he was counseling Vance to see what we could do to help Bhutto out. So we did not take a really hard line against him publicly. We just let the thing sit.

Bhutto came to realize that this was having no positive impact in Pakistan for him at all, wasn't getting him anywhere, so he put out a little feeler that he might want to find a way to compose our differences.

He called me over one night, and just he and I and his Foreign Minister sat out on his lawn (and were bitten by mosquitos) while we made the first tentative steps towards getting our relationship back on some normal keel.

Q: How did he put it?

CONSTABLE: Well, he didn't apologize (naturally). He defended his charges and said that he had this dossier of incidents and charges. And I said, “I would welcome the opportunity to see that.” I wanted to see that list so that we could talk about it. Well, it was never quite forthcoming, but he said he would give it to the Secretary at some point.

What we arranged in that meeting was for his Foreign Minister to meet with Secretary Vance in Paris. I think it was a couple of weeks hence, the Secretary had to be there for some purpose, some other meeting, and met with Aziz.

But, anyway, there was a desire on both sides to bury the hatchet and not go on in this way publicly. He stopped, and his press stopped, making these charges that we were trying to overthrow him, but none of it was ever retracted.

Q: Let me ask you just a little operational thing. All of a sudden you get these charges. You're sure they're false, but did you have any feeling of: My God, is anybody (I'm particularly thinking of the CIA) doing something that I don't know about?

CONSTABLE: Yes, of course, of course.

Q: And did you sit down and say: Come on, fellows, let's talk about this?

CONSTABLE: Yes, we did that. We did that. I called people in and said, “Does anybody know of anything that...” And I said, “This is a very delicate moment, and Bhutto is going to be out looking for opportunities to prove his charges, so I want everybody to be super-cautious and lay back and not see opposition people at this particular point, while they've got Bhutto by the throat. Let's just knock it off. We can cool it for awhile. We can pick up those contacts again. We don't need to exploit these at the moment. Let's just sit still.”

So the orders were out to all the Political Officers not to go see their political guys and that sort of thing. One officer disobeyed the instructions, came and told us about it a few days later, and I sent him home, because I had assured the Secretary that we were not doing anything that Bhutto could take exception to.

Q: Was this officer, obviously we don't want names, but was this just because he or she couldn't sit still?

CONSTABLE: Partly that. It was poor judgment on his part. A couple of guys showed up at his door, young guys who were political contacts of his. What particularly disturbed me about that particular contact was that they were fresh from a demonstration where they were being chased by the police and had come into an American officer's house. So I just thought he showed remarkably poor judgment.

Q: What about the CIA? There is sometimes the feeling that the CIA can be a rogue elephant, but I take it the atmosphere was not such that you might think they were playing a different policy.

CONSTABLE: No. No. Not at all. Not at all. I had no reason to think that at all. No. No. They were very cooperative and, in a sense, were very helpful.

Q: This was just using America as "the Great Satan."

CONSTABLE: Yes, yes. And twisting and distorting little things that came to his attention. An interesting example was what he did with these taped telephone conversations that his intelligence people had intercepted.

A couple of weeks before this speech, maybe three weeks before, Bhutto had gone down to Lahore and had gone into a hotel and not emerged for 72 hours, while there were huge demonstrations going on in the streets every day. Rumors began to fly that he was about to quit.

A journalist called our Consul General in Karachi (this was a source that our Consul General trusted and had known for a long time) and told him that Bhutto, indeed, was going to resign, and that his people wanted to know if he would be welcome in the United States; would he get a visa?

Well, this was at night, and it struck our Consul General in Karachi as something that we needed to know about right away, and that it was a question that might be posed to us in real terms very suddenly, and that we needed to get our act together: What would we do if Bhutto wanted to leave Pakistan and go to the United States? Would he be welcome there?

So he called our Political Counselor in Islamabad and, using euphemistic language, tried to describe the question that was posed. And the way he put is was, “My source tells me the party is over....” So the Political Counselor then called me and used much the same language to describe the issue.

I think at that point I went over and saw Byroade, and we talked about it. I can't remember if we sought guidance from Washington at that point or not.

But, the way Bhutto used this, I think he genuinely misunderstood. The phones were tapped, and he got this tape and he listened to this, and he said, “Oh, they're saying I'm finished. The Americans are saying I'm finished.”

So he quotes this conversation and says, “Let me tell you, gentlemen, the party is not over!”

There was nothing malicious in what we were doing at all — totally insincere.

And I had another example, later, of Bhutto misunderstanding. I had a very good friend whom I'd known in Lahore who was in politics, and Bhutto had just named him as his Minister of Food, I think. I did a little amateur theatrical stuff while I was in Islamabad, and I

was going to be in a play. He called me one time and we started talking about the play — it was a conversation almost entirely about the play.

He was then called in by Bhutto who said, “What do you mean talking to Constable on the telephone about my sexual exploits?”

Well, it was never in the conversation at all!

Pakistani English and American English aren't exactly the same, so these bizarre misinterpretations and misunderstandings come very easily.

Q: Particularly in a situation which could be true in the United States. When political paranoia sets in, anything can happen.

CONSTABLE: Yes. Well, any Pakistani politician suffers from paranoia, and with reason, because people are out to get him — at least his own opponents are — by every device available. But they tend to think that American policy operates that way, too. Most of the time I think it doesn't. Sometimes it probably does, but in this instance, it certainly didn't.

Q: Today is March 7, 1990. This is interview Number Two with Ambassador Peter Constable. We finished the last interview talking about Bhutto trying to blame the United States for his difficulties. Let's now talk about what happened after that period. Would you give the time frame?

CONSTABLE: Yes, we're in the spring of 1977. Bhutto fairly quickly found that trying to shove his difficulties off on the United States, in an effort to create some sort of ground swell of support based on nationalism and anti-Americanism, really wasn't taking him anywhere. The opposition was not cowed by this effort. In fact, there was no great anti-American rallying in the country.

So Bhutto began to back off from this and look for ways to reach some kind of an accommodation with us. But his difficulties in the streets continued and even got worse.

The Saudis became very active in trying to mediate some sort of a compromise between Bhutto and his political opponents. For awhile it looked as if they might be successful. It was very clear that Bhutto was going to have to give something very substantial, like new elections monitored in some way.

The surprising development, I guess, was the fact that in the middle of this mediation effort by the Saudis, Zia made his move and overthrew Bhutto.

Q: Zia was who?

CONSTABLE: Zia was the Chief of Staff of the Army, who had been hand-picked by Bhutto presumably because he would be dependent on Bhutto, was not senior enough in the military, did not have that prestige to run the military as an independent entity. And Bhutto thought that he would be dependent on him, that indeed Zia did seem to be for some period.

But pressures within the military were growing to do something. The thing that the military has always hated in Pakistan is to be used as a force for the maintenance of civil order and turn their guns on the population. And it was that feeling that impelled Zia to strike.

It would have been more understandable if he had made his move after a collapse of the Saudi mediation effort, but he moved in the middle of it, for reasons which are not entirely clear.

In one of those things that happens, a series of coincidences, Ambassador Hummel had just arrived in Pakistan and had presented his credentials to President Chowdri.

As part of his desire to cool things down with the United States, Bhutto had indicated that he wanted to come to our Fourth of July party. So an effort had to be made to arrange an opportunity for Hummel to call on Bhutto. Because Bhutto was caught up in this very elaborate and intense political negotiation, it was hard to schedule an appointment.

Q: I might point out, for those not aware of diplomatic niceties, the Ambassador has to call on the Prime Minister pretty much before the Prime Minister can come calling the other way around.

CONSTABLE: Exactly. It's a protocolary point, but an important one in relations between states.

In any event, Bhutto's aide kept assuring Hummel that, yes, Bhutto wanted to see him, and to stand by. Well, we were into July 3rd, and then into the night of July 3rd, and the reception was at midday on the 4th.

Finally, in the wee hours of the Fourth of July, about 12:30 in the morning, or one o'clock, Hummel got his call to come and see Bhutto. So he duly trotted over there.

And the next day, Bhutto showed up at the midday Fourth of July party. And, in fact, everybody was there who counted in Pakistan. The opposition political leaders were there. General Zia was there. The President of the country was there.

I only mention this because it was that very night, about eleven o'clock or midnight, that Zia made his move and overthrew Bhutto.

I'm sure that there are many people in Pakistan who believe to this day that somehow that peculiar chain of events, of Hummel going to see Bhutto at one o'clock in the morning, Bhutto showing up at the embassy at noon and being overthrown that night, was something engineered by the United States.

Q: Let me ask (this is obviously an unclassified interview) what was our attitude towards Bhutto at that time, and were you concerned (we mentioned this before in our earlier interview) about anybody within our embassy community meddling around encouraging the military?

CONSTABLE: No, not at all, not at all. We wanted to see some kind of peaceful solution of this. The mediation effort that the Saudis were undertaking looked promising at that moment, and we thought it stood a reasonable chance of success.

We were standing our distance from this. We were not seeking to involve ourselves as a mediator. We were concerned by what was going on in Pakistan, because there was a tremendous stand-off and disruption in Pakistan as the result of the aftermath of the elections and this opposition in the streets to Bhutto. But, I think as I said in the last interview, our relations with Bhutto had been very good up to the point of the elections.

We had one major disagreement with him, and it was an important one, over Pakistan's nuclear policy. It's an issue which remains to this day.

But, otherwise, we thought Bhutto had been a force for stability and had done well. We didn't think his record was terribly spectacular on the economic side. But we also understood that in his second administration he intended to change his policies in a more market-oriented way, which we thought would be good for the country.

So we had no policy differences with Bhutto, with Pakistan, except over the nuclear issue. And we did not think that anybody else was going to be any easier to deal with. I think events have proved us right. Zia was not easier to deal with on the nuclear issue.

Q: Again, let's look at it from how the embassy reacted, heard, and what you did, because I want to have somebody who's not familiar with what we do... how do we operate? Here's a coup in what we consider a critical country, what did you do?

CONSTABLE: One always stands back and tries to assess whether a coup is going to be effective, and whether the people who have made the coup can establish order and establish themselves in power. So one tends to avoid taking any steps which sanction the coup.

We have gotten away, as a policy matter, from using formal recognition as a step following a coup. We now take the posture that relations are between states, and they're a continuing matter, no matter what government is in office.

But at the same time, after a coup, we tend to go rather slowly in developing our relationships with the new government until we come to understand that they're there to stay, that the coup has in some way been accepted and is not a resisted coup or the country is suddenly in a civil war situation.

As it turned out in Pakistan, the coup seemed to be welcomed. The opposition that had been badgering Bhutto in the streets certainly welcomed it, and Bhutto's own party seemed quite passive. They did not take to the streets and resist the effects of this.

Q: Could you describe how you saw the actual coup?

CONSTABLE: The actual coup was bloodless and in the middle of the night. Some soldiers marched into Bhutto's quarters, woke him up and informed him that he was under arrest. There was apparently no resistance from presidential guards or anything of the sort.

So we did not learn of the coup until the following morning when we woke up and people turned on their radios and martial music was playing. There was suspension of the normal programming.

I drove in to the embassy at about eight o'clock, the usual hour, and the Political Officer, Arnie Raphel, who was subsequently Ambassador in Pakistan and was killed there in the plane crash with Zia a year and a half ago, was waiting for me in front of the embassy.

He said, “There was a coup last night.” I was astonished. The timing of it, as I said earlier, was totally unexpected.

So the first thing that an embassy does in a situation like that is try to gather as much information, report back to Washington, so that Washington is not any more surprised, anyway, than the embassy was. And then try to assess what we think the prospects are for such a government, what they might do and what the impact of this would be on US-Pakistan relations.

Q: Did somebody from those running the coup get in touch with you or did you get in touch with them? How does one establish relations with this new group?

CONSTABLE: I don't recall the specific steps that we took. I don't recall that they immediately contacted us, although that may have happened. We may have been called into the foreign ministry and been given some sort of an explanation, that all embassies would have been called in. I think that's probably likely, but I don't really remember that. I know for the first few days most of our contacts with the government were through the foreign ministry. I mean, nobody ran over to see Zia and say, “Congratulations.” But, bit by bit, of course, we did hear from them, all parts of the government.

Q: I assume that Ambassador Hummel probably gathered everybody together, and of course he's brand new anyway, and said, “Who is this guy Zia, and who knows him?” How did you see it at the time?

CONSTABLE: As it turned out, Arnie Raphel was the one who really knew Zia and established a relationship with him when he was perhaps not even yet Chief of Staff of

the Army. Arnie had gotten to know him through our military assistance programs and had become really quite friendly with him.

Obviously, the things that Washington wanted to know were: What kind of a government is this likely to be? What kind of a person is Zia? Is he likely to be an effective leader?

And, frankly, our assessment at the time was that Zia was a soldier and not likely to be very swift as a politician, and that he'd better figure out some way to turn power over to a civilian government, because he was unlikely to be able to handle the thing.

Of course, we couldn't have been more wrong. I think we were right initially. The moves that he made politically were very clumsy, but he learned fast. Within six months he had demonstrated that he really was in charge and knew what he was doing.

He lasted for ten years, until his death in the airplane accident. He proved to be a very shrewd and astute politician, and very adept about maneuvering his opponents.

But, at the time, we thought that he had better get his act together and find some way to elections and get back out of there within two or three months. And, in fact, that's what he wanted to do initially. But it proved, from his perspective, not possible. He arrested Bhutto; within a month he let Bhutto out. And he talked about having elections in September or October.

Q: Of '77.

CONSTABLE: Yes. This was early July when he was overthrown, and he talked about being back out of office in three months. His calculation was that Bhutto would be so discredited by revelations the government then started putting out about Bhutto's misdeeds that the country could have elections and Bhutto would lose.

Well, that was a miscalculation, because the Bhutto phenomenon was not over at all. He remained an extremely popular political figure. When he was released from prison he

immediately started organizing massive political demonstrations. And they were huge. There were just enormous turnouts as he went to Lahore and to Karachi. These terrified the government, so they had to figure out something else.

It became apparent if there were early elections that Bhutto would win. And that would be intolerable for the Army that had just thrown him out. They had made a serious miscalculation on what the effect of Bhutto's arrest would be on the people's party, on his support.

The kind of thing that we were saying to the government was, yes, you need to go to elections, because we didn't think that Zia could handle this politically. And we also felt that Pakistan needed to have democratic institutions, that the only way ultimately that Pakistan could develop political stability was through the exercise of a more democratic system.

But Zia backed off and postponed elections. He continuously promised elections, but they began to recede into a more distant future until he figured out another plan. He then did, subsequently, have elections. He had some non-party elections. All of this was after I had left Pakistan.

After this scare for Zia, when he let Bhutto out and it became apparent that Bhutto was still a highly popular figure, it was then that Zia and his advisors developed the strategy of trying Bhutto for his misdeeds, and then ultimately having him sentenced to death and hanging him.

Q: He was hanged on April 4, 1979. What role were we playing, as you saw it at the time, on these developments? This is the Carter Administration; human rights was very big on our agenda; we no longer had Henry Kissinger, who saw Pakistan as being vital for the China card; Carter, who was probably less interested in Pakistan, perhaps more in India; it was the usual Democrat-Republican thing; plus Carter's mother had served in the Peace Corps in India; etc., etc.

CONSTABLE: All of that is true. Those impacts of attention to human rights, greater interest in India, were truer of the period up to Bhutto's overthrow, or maybe a few months before that. I think some of that began to give way to a slightly more r#al politique view as the Carter Administration found the world more complicated perhaps than it had initially thought.

The Administration was hearing from the Shah that he was interested in stability in Pakistan.

And, as every Administration finds, you can't quite play the game with India that people like to think you can. Here's the world's largest democracy. We ought to have so much in common, why can't we make common cause and be really close friends?

Well, the Indians had their special relationship with the Soviets, their own hostilities to the Chinese, their difficulties with Pakistan, and considerable animosity against the United States. So they were never a player that we could quite bring into play the way some people tended to think. It just never worked out.

So one's attention was turned back, sometimes, to Pakistan, even though one didn't quite start out there.

Then, I believe it was in '78, there was the coup in Afghanistan by Communists. That caused great concern in Pakistan, and in Iran, and in Washington.

So there was a change. Now we didn't give up on certain basic premises. We continued to believe that ultimately Pakistan had to get back to democratic processes. But the way in which we dealt with that in Pakistan may have undergone some subtle shift.

Q: We have to remember, because right now things are changing so much in the other way, we're talking about March 1990. This period will probably be one of the great

historic periods of, certainly, the post-World War II period, but at that time we were really concerned about Brezhnev and an expanding Soviet.

CONSTABLE: Indeed we were.

Q: Would you talk a little bit about how you saw the Afghanistan business at that time.

CONSTABLE: If you can think of it in a larger context: The Carter Administration was faced with difficulties in the Horn, in Somalia, Ethiopia, the Ethiopians developing a much closer relationship with the Soviets, the Somalis being beaten down in the Ogaden War, which...

Q: This is in the Horn of Africa.

CONSTABLE: And there were those who were arguing, in a very public way, that the Carter Administration was presiding over a disintegration of American influence around the world, and that we were letting the Soviets take advantage of our weakness. It was alleged that this is what was happening in the Horn, it was happening in Angola.

In that context, then, there was a Communist coup in Afghanistan, and this was viewed as one more example of the Soviets on the march and US influence receding.

That was certainly very much the way events were seen in Pakistan by Pakistanis. They were extremely concerned about this. They had counted, for decades, on, if not an alliance with the US, US benevolence and influence to hold back Soviet influence in South Asia and a Soviet thrust toward the Indian Ocean. So they were deeply concerned about the direction of American foreign policy, and then really quite panicked when the coup occurred in Afghanistan. Just by chance when that happened, Art Hummel was away in Washington and I was again Charg#. I was called in by either the Foreign Minister or the Foreign Secretary (I can't remember what he was then) Foreign Minister Agha Shahi, I think, and asked what this coup meant to the United States, and what it meant in terms of

US-Pakistan relations. What he was looking for was our interpretation of this coup in light of the 1959 bilateral agreement with Pakistan, the US-Pakistani bilateral agreement.

I was able to get back to him after consulting with Washington and tell him, the very next day, that we viewed events in Afghanistan with great concern. And that any threat to Pakistan by a Communist-dominated or a Communist-controlled power would trigger a response from the US under the 1959 bilateral agreement, which did not specify what kind of action we would take.

It didn't say that we would send in troops or anything of that sort, but the implication was that we would, in some way, assist Pakistan militarily, either with military equipment... And we would certainly use our influence to protect Pakistan against a Communist threat. They found that vastly reassuring.

But this was the kind of thing that the Carter Administration was being pushed into by developments around the world. It was something of a reversal of the kind of policies that the Carter Administration wanted to pursue at the beginning of the administration, but events pushed them in a different direction.

It affected, obviously, the way we dealt with the Zia regime, too. Certainly, from the moment of a Communist coup in Afghanistan, we were not going to beat Zia around the ears to the point that his government collapsed. We were, from that point on at least, really interested in stability in Pakistan.

Now we continued to believe that the long-range stability in that country depended on the development of democratic institutions. But we were not prepared to say to Zia, “You've got to step aside tomorrow and get on with elections,” because we appreciated the political dilemma that existed in Pakistan, the deep divisions between the PPP and the rest of the body politic.

Q: Looking ahead after your time that you dealt with it in another context. Pakistan, as far as American relations —they burned down our embassy. And, in a couple of days, the Soviets were bouncing into Afghanistan, in December of '79. Instead of our remaining mad, we had to get down to the immediate thing.

CONSTABLE: Yes, that was a logical consequence of what I've been talking about. But, in the meantime, other things had intervened: the collapse of the Shah in Iran, and then the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Q: So we didn't have time for taking care of, you could almost say, the minor matter of now protecting the embassy. How did we deal with the problem of Bhutto? How did you see this? Here he is stirring up crowds; Zia's got to respond. What were we doing on the ground and also from Washington?

CONSTABLE: We were observing and reporting. We were not taking any kind of a policy position on this, other than letting the Pakistan government know, letting Zia know, that we thought he needed to find a way to get on to an election process and get the Army back in the barracks and out of power. As I say, the urgency with which that message was delivered shifted over time as other things happened in the region.

More difficult for us, or more painful I think for everyone, was what was going to happen to Bhutto once Zia embarked on this process of a trial, a public trial, and then condemned him to death.

Q: Did you and the embassy see, once he started on the trial business, that this was the ultimate conclusion?

CONSTABLE: The logic of it always seemed to me that, yes, he had to put him to death, that the way Zia had constructed his own position, there was no way out. There was a Punjabi saying: “Two men and one grave.” One or the other had to go in it.

Even as we urged him, after Bhutto was sentenced to death, to pardon him, or to put him in exile, or in some way to spare him, I personally felt that the logic of it was that Zia could not do that.

Bhutto, out of the country, would have been forever a threat to Zia's regime. Bhutto, in jail in the country, would have been a similar threat. Zia built a political construct in which Bhutto had to be eliminated, which was unfortunate.

Q: Could you follow through on the Bhutto business. What role we were playing as this moved on its way? Were we passive the whole time, or were we getting...?

CONSTABLE: No, we made several representations to Zia and the Pakistani government urging that Bhutto's life be spared. We did not have a formula to sort out the political problems in Pakistan. But we made it very clear to Zia that we thought it was a mistake, that also on human rights grounds, we thought he ought to be spared, although we had to be very careful about this, since we have capital punishment in our own country. So the element of opposing this as a human rights issue was rather muted. We put it in humanitarian terms rather than human rights, and in political terms, that we thought it was a mistake for this to happen. This kind of thing had never been done in Pakistan.

Q: There was the example of Minderas in Turkey, of the same thing.

CONSTABLE: Which it seemed to me was an object lesson, in the other direction, for Pakistan. But it was a dilemma, because, analytically, it was difficult to see how Pakistan would return to any kind of political stability while Bhutto was a factor. If he returned to power, either he would have to eliminate all his enemies or his enemies would be back in the street as they were just before his overthrow. So it was difficult to see just how the country got itself out of this dilemma.

In a way, Zia did. He took a long time, and he moved very, very slowly through a series of steps towards limited democracy, non-party elections, and constituting an assembly that

allowed for political expression and political debate. But still there was in effect a kind of martial law on top of it with Zia running things. Step by step, he moved towards a multi-party democracy. After he was killed, then they moved very rapidly and held elections.

The Bhutto phenomenon, obviously, still exists in that his daughter is now the Prime Minister. But I think it has a different context to it now than it had ten years ago. People have changed and their views have changed. Benazir, while she has many of her father's qualities and political abilities, is not her father. The country is not the same as it was ten years ago. It has moved on in important ways. So this kind of process may work now in that Pakistan may be able to go through a series of elections and develop some institutional stability that it has always lacked.

Q: Was it apparent that the opposition group, which would be at that point the Bhutto supporters, was looking to the American Embassy to pull some sort of trick? Were we blamed for what was happening to Bhutto?

CONSTABLE: Oh, I think to some extent we were blamed, yes. There were those in Bhutto's party who found it convenient to blame us. At the same time, I think they could hear what we were saying, which was that we wanted to see Pakistan return to elections. And I think they recognized that it was, to some extent, pressure from the outside that kept Zia moving towards elected politics and forced him to take some of these steps. Of course, there were internal pressures that forced him to do so, also. But he kept hearing from outside.

And after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when we...

Q: This would be December of '79.

CONSTABLE: That was December of '79. And it was not until sometime in '81 that we came to agreement with Pakistan on a very large aid program, a five-year program, and

agreed on the sale of F-16s to Pakistan. From that point on, Pakistan obviously had to be very concerned about what opinion was in the US and in the US Congress.

And so Zia understood that he had to hear these expressions of support for a more democratic system. And he took those steps. I think, had he lived, one probably would have seen something similar to the kinds of elections which were held right after his death that led to Benazir coming into power — although he wouldn't have liked that. He wouldn't have liked that result, but I think he would have been in a position where he had to accept it.

Q: When did you leave, and what did you do?

CONSTABLE: I left Pakistan in June of '79. At that point I came back to Washington as the Senior Deputy in the Near East-South Asia Bureau. That gave me responsibilities across-the-board in NEA, but I also paid a lot of special attention to the South Asia side, to what I knew best.

Q: Who was the Assistant Secretary?

CONSTABLE: Hal Saunders, for the first two years that I was in the job, until the Administration changed. Then Nick Veliotes was appointed the last year.

Q: Things moved with a terrible rush in that period, moving away from Israel's confrontation with the Arab States. All of a sudden we were looking at... And the other thing was Afghanistan and Iran, which was more in your bailiwick. How did we view them and respond to developments?

CONSTABLE: Of course the first part of the Iran tragedy had already taken place. By the time I got back to Washington, the Shah was out and the revolution had occurred. Washington was concerned with ways to try to put something back together again and see if there was any way that we could deal with this regime in Tehran.

You may recall, at that time, although Khomeini was obviously the supreme power, the civil government was still a secular one. Bazargan was the Prime Minister, and he had non-clerical people, by and large, staffing the government. So the judgment in Washington was that we should and could find, somehow, ways to deal with this secular government. The seizing of the hostages, I think, was very much a part of a power play within Iran.

Q: This was in November '79.

CONSTABLE: In early November of '79, with the more radical Islamic fundamentalist revolutionary elements seeking to enhance their power and, in effect, overthrow a secular government and constitute a religious, clerical revolutionary government. The hostage issue became an instrument for achieving that.

And, indeed, within days after the seizure of the embassy and the hostages, the Bazargan government collapsed and was replaced, first, by Bani Sadr, who still was secular. But he was soon put on the rack, also, for his involvement in the hostage crisis, and within a few months he was out.

And then it was a purely religious, clerical government. Once the aims of that revolutionary group were achieved, then the hostages became superfluous to their purposes. And the kind of embarrassment that holding the hostages caused Iran, and the pressures of trade embargoes, and political and diplomatic isolation began to tell, to some extent, as well as the war with Iraq.

At that point, then, Iran looked for a way to get rid of them. But, until the hostages had served their purpose of accomplishing the revolutionary goals of the radical Islamic fundamentalists, we really had no chance to get them out.

Q: How did we see it as this hostage crisis developed? There had been other times when the Ambassador had been taken over in the embassy. Did this thing appear to be just one of those temporary blips?

CONSTABLE: In the very first few days, we hoped that that's what it would be. There had been an incident in February, on Valentine's Day, as you may recall, when the compound was overrun. The Ambassador was able to quickly get assistance from the government to turn this around, and the compound was very quickly returned to American control.

So, when this happened in November there was a hope. Bruce Laingen, the Charg#, was, at the time that the compound was taken over, at the foreign ministry making a representation on some other issue. He stayed in the foreign ministry throughout most of the hostage crisis.

But in those first two or three days, he hoped to be able to persuade the government to reverse itself or to disassociate itself from what had happened in the compound, and to use its authority to get the guys out who had taken the hostages.

Unfortunately, there was really quite a different stamp on the takeover this time. The objective of those who were engineering this, clearly, was to get rid of the Bazargan government that Laingen was trying to deal with, and ultimately replace it with a radical revolutionary government. So there was a different context in which the takeover occurred than had been the case earlier in February.

As you will also recall, ostensibly what triggered this was the Shah being admitted to the United States. The Shah had been in Morocco and Egypt, and then the US agreed to allow him to come to the United States for medical treatment. The Iranians were infuriated by that.

Q: Did the bureau have any input into this or was this done at a higher level?

CONSTABLE: It was done at a high level. We did have an input. We were asked for our views, and we gave them.

Q: Which were?

CONSTABLE: Which were that this would be a very dangerous move if we wished to maintain a presence in Iran. And I think the President knew that it was potentially a dangerous move.

Q: Were you getting pretty good readings on what was happening, either from people who'd served there or from the CIA, so you understood some of the dynamics there and how this thing was pretty much under control as far as the old system? Looking back on it, how well do you think we were served by what we had developed there over the years?

CONSTABLE: There was quite an array of opinion, even from people who knew Iran very well. I was not an Iranian expert, but it's very clear, in retrospect, we underestimated the depth and the fervor of the Islamic element and their ability to force the pace in Iran, and perhaps overestimated the ability of old-time, secular democrats who had suffered during the period of the Shah and obviously had not been allowed to participate in the political process. But they were people who were known to embassy officials over the years and respected. We perhaps attached more credibility to them than the facts warranted.

Q: Well, this almost comes with the territory, doesn't it? Looking at it objectively, it's very difficult for an embassy to deal with quite radical groups that are anti-Western. You don't have Mullah friends, really, or Ayatollah friends.

CONSTABLE: I think that's a very good point. It is hard to have those contacts. It is hard to get to know these people. It is hard, therefore, to make accurate assessments of what their political capabilities are and where they really stand, what they really want. I think that's a very valid point. You end up talking, in effect, to those who will talk to you.

Q: Can you give a little idea what it was like? I was not in Washington at the time, but every day the news commentators would say the hostages have been in for umpty-ump days. This went on for 444 days. The wives, whose husbands were in there, were coming and being very...move ahead with the rescue mission anyway.

Q: Let me ask, was one option, right at the beginning (which looking back on it maybe we should have done), the tit for tat business? In other words, we had a mission, and you just take the Iranians and put them in the Greenbrier Hotel, or whatever one does (we've done this before), and say: Okay, now it's time, you've held our embassy, we'll hold your embassy. And this puts some pressure on the other side. Was that considered at the time?

CONSTABLE: We thought about things like that. There were some legal difficulties, I think, with some of the things that you suggest, of holding hostages in the United States.

Q: But there is... I mean, if we went through this during war... We did this.

CONSTABLE: Some kind of internment. Yes, I think that could have been done. There was a very strong feeling, at the beginning, that there may not have been any authority in Tehran that had real control of those who were holding the hostages, and that for us to take retaliatory steps could endanger the hostages. Now that may have been a misreading, a misassessment, but that's what people thought at the time. This kind of thing was certainly talked about.

We had an enormous problem of the 80,000 Iranian students in the United States, some of whom, as you may recall, at that time were running around organizing pro-Khomeini demonstrations in downtown Cleveland, and that kind of thing. People were outraged.

Q: I recall that there was an interesting side to this. I was in charge of our consulate general in Naples, and all throughout Europe there were Iranian students who were asking for visas. The State Department Visa Office, to get the pressure off, said, “Oh, give them non-immigrant visas.” And we said, “Screw you. We won't.” And we didn't. It was really a

revolt of the consular officers. We said, "We will obey the law. We're not going to put any more of these students into the United States."

CONSTABLE: I remember that, indeed. These were some of the kinds of problems that we were coping with all the time. Dealing with the press, dealing with the Congress, dealing with these issues of Iranian students running around the United States and getting beaten up, actually, by quite understandably hostile Americans who did not like to see people carrying pro-Khomeini banners down the street while our hostages were held in Tehran.

But each one of these issues had to be looked at, from our point of view, in terms of what impact this was going to have on the hostages and on the hostage crisis itself. I suppose you could say that we tended to be perhaps overly careful, over cautious, in our determination to try to protect the safety of the hostages.

We were perhaps less severe with Iranian students here and the Iranian Embassy here. Eventually, but it took several months, we closed the embassy here. But for a long time we listened to and bought the argument that, absent anything that we could usefully do in Tehran, it was important to have some voice back to the Iranian government through their Iranian Embassy here in Washington.

I think, in retrospect, one can say that did us no good at all. It was not a useful voice. It wasn't even an honest voice in terms of honest reporting. They always put their own spin on things anyway.

But it was an extremely difficult time, partly because of the intense spotlight that was on this crisis, and the intense pressure on the Administration, at every step of the way, to do something. Within a few days after the hostages were seized, we did what probably turned out to be the most important and useful thing that we did though the whole thing, which was freezing Iranian assets here. Because that gave us something that they wanted back.

Q: That came as a surprise to the Iranians, didn't it?

CONSTABLE: I think so, yes. Apparently it did.

Q: Nobody, of course, was in charge, and they didn't see this as a whole.

CONSTABLE: There was reluctance here to do it, and for very good reasons. We have found very useful our ability to act as a repository for funds from around the world. And there were those who were very, very concerned that the Saudis, and other big money-earners who deposit a lot of money in the States, would be alarmed if we did this to Tehran, no matter what the provocation, that the US would no longer be seen as a necessarily totally safe repository for funds. So that was debated for a day or so. But the need was overwhelming to do it, to create some kind of a counterbalance to Iran holding the hostages.

As it turned out in the end, having seized the assets, getting rid of them was also very complicated, because there were all kinds of court cases that had been registered in the meantime of people who had claims against Iran. And all of that had to be taken care of in some way. It was extremely complex, but we were able to work through all of that at the end.

Within a month, we were trying to look for some kind of negotiating track that might be able to do something with the Iranians. We tried to work through the U.N. and Waldheim.

Waldheim was the Secretary-General of the U.N. He made a trip to Tehran in which he was embarrassed, humiliated, maltreated by howling mobs of Islamic fanatics. Whatever one may think of Waldheim, I must say he acted with some courage in that situation. It was not a situation I would want to have been put in.

But very little came of that, although that particular U.N. track became folded into a bilateral negotiating thing that we got involved in with Bani Sadr's government, which I think came close to success.

And I say that only in this sense, that Bani Sadr, who was the elected President of Iran at that time, and his Foreign Minister, Ghotbzadeh, wanted to get rid of the hostage problem. We're talking about January, February, and into early March of 1980. I think they wanted to do it, but in the end they were unable to swing Khomeini.

Khomeini seemed to give them his blessing. But then, at the critical moment, when it came to the actual moment to move the hostages out of the embassy compound and into a hospital, which was going to be an interim stage before their ultimate release, Khomeini did not support them.

And Bani Sadr was not very long after that out of office, as was Ghotbzadeh. And this was, again, a step in the deepening of the revolution by the radicals, the use of the hostages as the instrument for achieving that.

So that was a major negotiating effort that collapsed at the last moment, and had an impact in the election and primary process that was going on in the States at the time.On the diplomatic side, we were trying to crank up some sanctions through the Security Council. There was reluctance. Everybody always hates sanctions or hates to have to do them. We were banging our European allies around the ears to get them to support sanctions. And in April, indeed, a limited program of sanctions was imposed.

But the other track that was going on at the same time was the planning for the rescue mission, which was then attempted in the middle of April. The failure of the rescue mission, tragic as it was, had one positive effect. It took some of the steam out of this tremendous political pressure to resolve the issue.

People saw the hostage crisis, after the failure of the rescue mission, as something that we were going to have to live with for awhile, that it was going to take time, and that the Administration had tried just about everything that seemed reasonable. So, in that sense, it gave us a kind of a respite.

By that time, the crisis had gone on for about five months, and we understood a good deal better than we had right at the beginning what the dynamic was in Iran.

Khomeini had laid out a process for writing a constitution, electing the new assembly, electing a council of ministers, and blah, blah, blah. There were a series of steps that were put in place, the institutional elements of the Islamic revolution. And it became apparent to us, in fact Iranians were saying this, that there could be no solution to the hostage crisis until these steps were complete.

Looking ahead in April, it seemed to us that not much would happen before summer or early fall. So we spent our time trying to broaden the sanctions, increase the pressures wherever we could find ways to do it, diplomatic pressures through friends, whoever would help us with this, increase the cost of holding the hostages in economic terms to the Iranians until they were through this process. And always letting them know, through the Swiss and through other means, that any time they were ready before that, obviously, we would be ready, too. But we understood it was going to be several more months.

Then, in September, when we thought it was the time that things should break, that was when the Iraqis invaded Iran. And, while ultimately that may have increased the pressures on the Iranians to settle, in the short term I think it delayed their consideration of the hostage issue.

Q: How did we feel about that? My initial reaction was, when the Iraqis invaded Iran, it couldn't happen to a nicer group of people.

CONSTABLE: Yes, that was everybody's emotional reaction.

Q: We didn't like either side, and if they did each other in, the world would be a better place.

CONSTABLE: Indeed. Those of us who were working on Iran and the hostage thing saw it initially in narrower terms, that it was deflecting Iran's attention from a solution. Just at the time when they should have been knuckling down to talking to us about getting the hostages out of there, they were distracted.

Q: An obvious question to ask was, was there any American involvement in encouraging the Iraqis to do something?

CONSTABLE: No, not at all. Not at all. No, not at all. No.

Now, ultimately, I think the war brought home to the Iranians how isolated they were, and that they needed both the money that we were holding in the United States, the frozen assets, and they needed better access to military equipment and spare parts.

They were having a lot of trouble, and we were putting as much pressure as we could on anybody who was a potential supplier to Iran. And they were feeling that pinch. So the war with Iraq did increase the pressure on them to solve it. But I think they were headed to solving it anyway. And in the short run it may have slowed them down coming to grips with the way to solve it.

Q: Moving from that, we can come back, how did we feel about developments in Afghanistan?

CONSTABLE: Within six to eight weeks, seven weeks, after the hostages were seized in Iran, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan to shore up what was a collapsing Communist regime in Kabul. This presented the Administration, of course, with another extremely serious issue. Could I talk a little bit about the lead-up to that?

Q: Please do.

CONSTABLE: I've always felt that this was an area in which we had a significant policy failure, that we did not find ways to convey to the Soviets what their intervention in Afghanistan would mean to US-Soviet relations, and what it would mean to the Soviet position worldwide, really.

Now, part of this, I think, was the context of the time. The Administration was, embattled is perhaps too strong a word, in the same kinds of things that I talked about earlier, problems in the Horn, problems with Cubans in Angola.

You may recall that, I think it was in September, perhaps as early as August of '79, there was a great rhubarb about an alleged discovery of a Soviet battalion in Cuba.

Q: Oh, yes.

CONSTABLE: Senator Frank Church, who was running for reelection in Idaho, which he subsequently lost, suddenly surfaced this illusory Soviet battalion in Cuba.

Q: I think it was a brigade.

CONSTABLE: A brigade, whatever. There were also problems with Sandinistas, and Soviet support for Sandinistas, or Cuban support for Sandinistas, in Nicaragua. So all of these things were on President Carter's plate at this time. They were impinging on the dialogue with the Soviets.

Carter had concluded a disarmament agreement, a nuclear weapons control agreement, with the Soviets, which was supposed to go up to the Senate. There were those who said it was in trouble. It was called SALT II. There were those who felt there was opposition in the Congress to this agreement. Part of that opposition was stimulated and fed and confirmed by what were seen as Soviet incursions in Africa, in the Caribbean, in Central America. So these issues were burdening the dialogue with the Soviets.

My sense at the time was, although I was not directly involved in US-Soviet affairs, that the Soviets were behaving a little bit arrogantly and were not taking seriously American representations on these issues.

There was a disposition in the government in that summer of '79 and early fall, number one, not to believe that the Soviets would intervene in Afghanistan, and then, number two, because the dialogue was already so freighted with things that we were having trouble getting the Soviets' attention on, nobody wanted to raise Afghanistan with the Soviets.

It was very late in the game, probably late November, early December, before we started saying things to our allies and to the Soviets against a Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, trying to warn the Soviets off.

I don't think we had the kind of full and frank dialogue that we should have had. I don't think the Soviets ever understood, before they intervened, just what our reaction would be, and how Carter would be absolutely forced to take a number of very drastic steps against the Soviets.

Q: It wasn't your particular area, the Soviet Union, but was there a problem of whom to talk to? Brezhnev was getting pretty dotty, in a way...

CONSTABLE: It could be. It could be. It could be. I was really not privy to just exactly how we carried on the dialogue with the Soviets, but certainly you're right. It was a group in Moscow that perhaps did not have the kind of leadership that we could plug into easily. It may have been getting too diffuse.

Q: How did we react then?

CONSTABLE: When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, this was of course seen as a major challenge to the United States. We saw Pakistan as in quite an exposed and weak

position. We were even more fearful that the Soviets could follow up an intervention in Afghanistan with some kind of an intervention in Iran.

Q: There was much talk about "drive for a warm-water port."

CONSTABLE: Drive for the warm-water port seemed to have been a Soviet ambition from Imperial days. And I think it probably was. Not that they were necessarily going to invade Pakistan to do this, but had they succeeded in consolidating their position in Afghanistan, and, given their relations with the Indians, they would have been in a position to put a tremendous political squeeze on Pakistan. I think Pakistan would have had a very hard time resisting them. Now, whether the Soviets really would have found useful an effort to develop a port in Baluchistan, who knows. But they might have, and, in an important strategic sense, outflanked the whole Gulf area.

Q: I'd like to get a little idea of this thinking. Looking at it in later times, it's easy. But the geography hasn't changed. And if anybody looks at the geography of that area, some of the most inhospitable areas of the world, whereas the Soviets are doing very nicely, thank you, with the Black Sea and going through ports... What's the big deal about... Was anybody saying this? Or was this just part of thinking that warm-water port always sounds...

CONSTABLE: That was not an argument or a discussion that was pursued very far. Nobody expected to see the Soviets trying to build a port in Baluchistan in the near or foreseeable future, but it was the idea of having Pakistan in a position where it had to succumb to Soviet pressure.

Given the problems in Iran, there was a concern about the US being outflanked in the whole Persian Gulf area. That if you have Pakistan swinging away from a relationship with the US towards a more pro-Soviet stance in Iran (with which we could hardly speak, let alone have any kind of a constructive relationship) in a terrible state of flux, and regimes that were of concern to us all though the Gulf in this period, particularly in this period of

religiously promoted turmoil... Nobody knew what was going to happen in Saudi Arabia or in all of the little Gulf States, in Kuwait... [TAPE ENDED]

Q: We're talking about Afghanistan and how we responded to it.

CONSTABLE: Maybe our response would have been much the same under any circumstances. But one can, I think, also plausibly make the argument that the response could also have been conditioned by the fact that we were in such difficulty in Iran.

The Administration was feeling the heat from charges that it had allowed the Soviets to develop a strong position in the Horn of Africa and in Angola and in Central America. So there was a feeling, again, that the Soviets were on the march and we were somehow in retreat.

Once the Soviet forces intervened directly in Afghanistan, it seemed like the throwing down of a gauntlet, in a sense. This was the first time, outside of Eastern Europe since the end of World War II, that Soviet troops had been deployed outside of the Soviet Union in a direct confrontation.

So we spent the whole Christmas holidays wrestling with what kind of responses the US and its allies should make to this. I recall going with Warren Christopher and a group of people from...

Q: Warren Christopher was the Deputy Secretary, which was the number two man.

CONSTABLE: We went off to Europe, particularly, to meet with the NATO Foreign Ministers to discuss Afghanistan, and to try to get agreement on a series of sanctions against the Soviet Union, responses.

These ranged from a boycott of the Moscow Olympics, which were coming up later that year, to cutting off all credits to the Soviet Union for certain kinds of imports or construction

projects, like a big Soviet natural gas pipeline across Europe, canceling Aeroflot routes into various places, things of that nature. There was a whole string of those.

Well, again, as I made the observation earlier, whenever you start talking sanctions with anybody, there's always a lot of resistance, because you're goring somebody's ox, and somebody's going to lose some money. I think there was general shock in Europe at the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Q: Did they see this as being something more than just strafing the border?. Did they feel that this might mean something within Europe, too?

CONSTABLE: Yes, indeed. Indeed. That's right. I think they felt that if the Soviets were able to get away with this and there were no particular reactions from NATO countries, Western countries, there could be very serious implications for this, over time, in Europe. They were really quite shocked by this. So, on a political level, they wanted to see a strong response, too. But there was always an issue of exactly what that should be.

Q: Well, we had trouble because we were selling wheat to the Soviets. Ronald Reagan, in his campaign, made a big deal about who would sell wheat.

CONSTABLE: That's right, but for that first year we cut off wheat sales. Then we tried to badger the Canadians and the Australians and the Argentines into following suit. Had a lot of trouble, had a lot of trouble. Which made it easier for Reagan to campaign on this, because you could make the argument, quite plausibly, that we were just punishing American farmers, and the Soviets were getting all the wheat they wanted anyway. These are the hard things that you get involved in.

I think Carter was quite courageous in taking that step, whether it turned out to be politically smart or not. But it was a strong response. And we needed to do some things ourselves that would persuade our allies that they needed to do some things, too.

Q: Did we see this becoming a real problem for the Soviets, or did we think the Soviets could probably do this and take it over? How did we feel about that?

CONSTABLE: This was debated for a long time within the Administration. There were two schools of thought: one, that, yes, Afghanistan really could be a kind of Vietnam War for the Soviets, that Afghans were fiercely independent, and were fierce fighters, and they could hide up in those hills and shoot away. I think most people felt that if the Soviets were prepared to put the numbers in and bring to bear the power which we thought they could, they would eventually subdue it.

The immediate policy decision out of all this was to make it costly for them. It was very early on that the program of assisting the freedom fighters in Afghanistan was initiated.

Q: Where did this policy... Was the Near Eastern Bureau involved in the...?

CONSTABLE: Yes.

Q: Were there any internal debates?

CONSTABLE: Very little. I think everybody agreed. The debate really centered on to what extent this might be effective.

It was, I can't remember when, but maybe a year, maybe 18 months, before lots of people began to think: Well, gee, not only can you make it expensive for the Soviets, but maybe they never really will fully control this.

It was much later in the game, and long after I had left it, that there was any plausibility to the argument that you might even force the Soviets to withdraw. Nobody believed that initially.

Q: But now, just to get a little of the mood. After the surprise invasion... I assume it was pretty much a surprise, wasn't it?

CONSTABLE: Well, no. It was not a surprise to me. There were those among the Sovietologists who argued that the Soviets would never do this. But what was happening in Afghanistan, it seemed to me, made it absolutely inescapable.

Q: Could you explain what was happening before.

CONSTABLE: After the coup of '78, you had a self-declared Communist regime in Afghanistan. These were all people who were prot#g#s of the Soviet Union. They'd been trained in Moscow. They were dependent on the Soviet Union. They went into a revolutionary reform program with a great deal of zeal, of land reform, and closing down mosques, and secularizing what was a profoundly Islamic society.

And they ran into trouble. They ran into trouble with a very conservative rural population. It wasn't very long before there was armed resistance to these reforms, and that began to grow.

And there was a disintegration of the Afghan army. The Afghan army began to lose battles with these fighters out in rural areas. It looked as if this Communist government in Kabul would collapse without some sort of external support.

Remember this was Brezhnev time, still. You had a Brezhnev doctrine in which the Soviets had declared that they, in effect, would not permit a reversal of a Communist regime anywhere in the world. And when the chips were down they marched in to save a Communist government.

Not to save individual people, because, in effect, they pulled a coup against Amin, who was president at the time. And they either killed him or had him killed, and replaced him with their own stooge, Babrak Karmal. So that's what was happening.

There was division within the US government whether the Soviets would do it or not. I think by the middle of November there were more believers, perhaps, than non-believers, the way things were happening.

So, perhaps the actual timing of the Soviet intervention was not known to us until about 24 hours before it happened — one could see a build-up of planes in certain parts of the Soviet Union, troop carriers, and that kind of thing — but I don't think we were surprised that an intervention happened, by the time it happened.

Q: Well, in looking at responses at this time, just to get a little of the mood... I take it then that particularly in the Near Eastern Bureau... I mean you were already going through this tremendous trauma of Iran, and to see this... You were feeling sort of bloody-minded, weren't you?

CONSTABLE: Oh, you bet!

Q: Stick it to whoever...

CONSTABLE: Well, there was that, yes. There was indeed that kind of a feeling, because not only did we have the Iran thing but, as part of the Iran thing, the American Embassy in Islamabad had been burned, and people were killed in that episode. We had the burning of our embassy in Libya. We had to withdraw our people from there. And then, because things were so uncertain in the area and people were getting so inflamed, we decided to do a general evacuation throughout the whole bureau. We pulled more than 1,000 dependents out of the area. So we did a massive evacuation, too, which was traumatic for a lot of people in a lot of posts. And then on came the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, so we felt embattled and bloody-minded.

Q: Well, moving on. How did you yourself view the changeover to the Reagan Administration? Going from a Carter to a Reagan is quite something, but I'm speaking about within the department.

CONSTABLE: The transition, as you probably heard from other people, was a very brusque one. The Reaganauts came in determined to erase all vestiges of that horrible, weak-kneed Carter Administration, and so on. They were tearing people's names off the doors. They didn't want a single Assistant Secretary's name left on a door who had served the Carter Administration. We all thought that was, obviously, a bit crude and sort of embarrassing to some people, individuals like George Vest, who was still there. It was unnecessary to do that kind of stuff.

I personally was not unhappy to see a new broom try some things. I really thought that in some ways, although the policy was changing by the end of the Carter Administration, the Carter Administration had been much too kind of dreamy in its policy. I personally have the greatest respect for President Carter and for his abilities, but I think he got off on some wrong tracks.

Q: This is just something as an aside. I think that for many of us in the Foreign Service, who are often accused of being leftish liberals and all this, we viewed Carter and all... We're up against the fact that good works, as you were talking about with India, no matter what you do, India remains India, and there isn't an awful lot of room to play with. And most of us who deal with these countries, there isn't the room that goodwill will bring. And for this reason, the Carter Administration at that point (in retrospect it looks a lot better) was not really terribly popular with the Foreign Service.

CONSTABLE: I think not.

Q: Even the human rights business was sort of grating. I think probably it's the greatest legacy he left.

CONSTABLE: Indeed, I think you're right.

Q: And I think it may have changed the world, literally. But at the time I was in Korea, and it was a pain in the neck. We had other things to worry about than human rights.

CONSTABLE: It was a rather abrupt change in emphasis in American policy, and so it was difficult to deal with, very difficult to deal with. I think the personalities who were in charge of this were particularly abrasive.

Q: Well, how did you feel, that Alexander Haig came in and brought a...

CONSTABLE: I think people felt, I certainly felt, that we had at the top a very able man who knew a good deal about foreign policy and was experienced. As it turned out, I think he presented very special problems for the Near East-South Asia Bureau, which had really not foreseen. I think he came... Should I say this on tape?

Q: Why don't you say it on tape. We can take it out, but, really, I think it's important.

CONSTABLE: I think he came with a very special agenda on the Middle East. And I think it had to do (this could be terribly unfair, but this is my reading of it) with his own domestic political ambitions. That he hoped to somehow convert being Secretary of State into a run at the presidency. And that he saw as an element in this, getting solid, solid support from the American Jewish community, which always contributes a great deal of money and effort to politics in the United States. And that the way to do that was through a very strongly pro-US policy towards Israel.

Now all administrations, I think, pursue a pro-Israeli policy — and with good reason. There are many reasons for doing so. But I think Haig was taking it beyond a point that other Administrations had done so. And my reading of it is that it had to do with his own political ambitions.

Q: Because he didn't come with any particular background in that area. He was a NATO man.

CONSTABLE: Not particularly. No. No. No. No. But it gave us a lot of difficulties.

Q: This is a very controversial thing, but did Haig give the red light to Sharon and Begin to go into Lebanon?

CONSTABLE: The green light. I think he probably did, with body language, at least, if not anything more explicit.

Q: Which was an absolute disaster for everybody concerned.

CONSTABLE: Yes, it indeed was. There was that, but, more fundamentally, there was this whole concept of strategic cooperation with Israel.

And I personally think that that's all a kind of a myth, that somehow Israel would be our aircraft carrier in the Middle East in an otherwise unreliable or hostile area. There's just really nothing to it.

The Israelis don't want to be that kind of an instrument for us. They saw strategic cooperation in a reverse thing, that they could get a lot out of the U.S. in terms of additional assistance and cooperation. And so they used this concept for their own ends. But I don't think there was anything particularly in it for us.

Q: I remember when I was a member of the Senior Seminar, we had the various members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff come and talk to us. And I posed the question to them: How important is Israel to us strategically? And you'd get sort of a blank look.

CONSTABLE: People became very inventive in trying to justify this.

Q: How much were you involved in (this is radically switching, but it's also within your purview, of course) the Israeli invasion of Lebanon? You can't call it anything else — it was an invasion of Lebanon. When did it happen?

CONSTABLE: Happily, it happened about two months after I left the bureau to go to Zaire. But for months before that, we had a kind of a Sunday drill. We'd all get called at home that there were disturbing signals that the Israelis were about to invade Lebanon, and we'd all rush down to the Department. We had a standard drill, practically a form telegram that we would put together and send up for Haig to send off to the Israelis telling them not to do it.

This went on, as I said, weeks and weeks, and then finally they did it. But by the time they did it, I had gone. But we were doing constant contingency plans in the event of, and that sort of thing. It was a big wheel-spinning exercise that went on for a long, long time. Very time-consuming, energy-consuming.

Q: I wonder, should we move off this and move to Zaire now?

CONSTABLE: Sure, sure, if you'd like to.

Q: There were a lot of other things, but were there any other areas that we might cover? Let me just ask this one question. How important did you view the Israeli lobby and the political influence on our dealing? Was there a difference between the Carter and Haig Administration, other than what you alluded to?

CONSTABLE: Other than what I alluded to, I think not. There is a very strong group on the Hill that is very responsive to the interests and concerns of Israel. They are also willing, I think, to try to put as much balance in this as long as Israeli concerns and interests are taken care of, they're also willing to support Egypt, and they're willing to listen sympathetically to problems about Jordan, and so on. So I don't mean that it's all one-

sided. It is not that, at all. But there is a very strong pro-Israeli lobby that is very effectively organized and uses its clout with great effect with members.

Q: Now, you were then appointed as Ambassador to Zaire. You were there from '82 to '84.

CONSTABLE: Yes. I arrived in Zaire sometime in October in '82, and I was there almost two years.

Q: Well, how did you get the appointment? After all, here you'd been over in one area, and all of a sudden you're... And it's not a minor country. I've seen the pattern where some of these are kind of like tombstone ambassadorships. You know, end of a career, we'll make you Ambassador to Upper Volta or something for a year or two. But Zaire is not that. Zaire is an important country.

CONSTABLE: Yes. Well, Personnel had me on their list of people who were ready to go out. They had talked to me initially about Zimbabwe. There was nothing opening up in the Near East-South Asia area.

In fact, over that year, if I had decided to stay in Washington another year and wait, maybe something else would have come available. But at the time there wasn't.

So we had talked about Zimbabwe, and I had said I was interested. And then it turned out the person who was there was not leaving, was staying another year.

So I was just called one day and asked if I would be interested in going to Zaire. That was coming open a little earlier than had been anticipated. I thought about it a little bit, and I said, “Sure.”

He said, “You don't have to go if you don't want to, because it's known as a difficult post where we have a troubled relationship, always, with Mr. Mobutu.”

Indeed, it was one of these periods of trouble where he was on his high horse a little bit.

Q: Could you explain about the period when you arrived, and particularly how you saw Mobutu, because he was pretty much Mr. Zaire, still is.

CONSTABLE: And still is, and has been for 25 years. Well, as I say, it's been an up and down relationship with Zaire. It's essentially a close one, but Mobutu gets concerned that we don't pay enough attention to him. He gets angry. We, or parts of the US government, get angry with him, charge him with corruption and violations of human rights, and slash our assistance to him.

So there's a lot of tension in the relationship all of the time, and this spills out into the diplomatic relationship. He may get hostile to a particular Ambassador and send him home, or tell the department he wants him recalled, and that kind of thing.

One goes to Zaire and confronts the man with a certain degree of trepidation.

Things had really been going very badly in Zaire by the time I got there. They were economically on the floor. Their credit was terrible. They had had agreements with the IMF and programs, and so on, but had violated all of them. And so the IMF didn't trust them any more, didn't want to deal with them. The World Bank still made some loans, but they were getting tired of it. All their bilateral partners were tired of Zaire's performance. And the US Congress was tired of it. Our aid levels were down very low, very little, and everybody regarded any money to Zaire as just kind of down the rat hole. And the Zairians were seen as not doing anything for themselves to shape up their economy. At the same time, for political reasons, reasons of geography, we thought Zaire was important. We valued our relationship with Zaire and wanted to have a good relationship with Zaire, but also wanted Zaire to begin to get hold of itself so it wouldn't spin down into some kind of chaos.

You look at the map and here is this huge country, which is as big as the US east of the Mississippi, plop in the middle of Africa. What happens in Zaire potentially has important repercussions through the area.

So, before I went, we talked around in the African Bureau and in the department, tried to hammer out a policy, which we did. The principal element in that was to try to get Zaire back into a program with the IMF.

Everybody who knew anything about Zaire, who had served there, who knew Mobutu, said, “This is mission impossible, it can't be done.”

I said, “Well, if we can't do it, if we can't get them in, we aren't going to be able to do anything else with them. Our relationship is going to be really strained. They are going to continue to disintegrate as a country, and there isn't going to be anything that we can do about it. We aren't going to be able to get any money from the Congress, no support, nobody's going to want to do anything for Zaire unless they will do something for themselves. If they will do something for themselves, then it is possible to get an IMF program, and then you can get some more assistance from others and get Zaire on the right path again.”

So that's what I went out to try to do, with everybody saying it can't be done. My arrival coincided with an understanding in Zaire and among Mobutu's advisors that they really had sunk pretty low, and that they needed to do some things. So, I came with the right message at the right time.

Q: You talk about his advisors. He listened to people within his government?

CONSTABLE: Oh, indeed. Oh, indeed.

Q: Some of these charismatic, or whatever it is, are so autocratic that they don't listen to anybody.

CONSTABLE: No, Mobutu listens to a lot of people. Sometimes maybe he listens too much, I don't know, because he has in the past taken some terrible advice.

A number of years ago, a Belgian Socialist bent his ear and got him to nationalize everything in the country, which was just a disaster. No matter what you may feel about free-market economies and Socialism, in the Zairian context it was just a massive disaster, because there was nobody who could run these businesses, and they just completely flopped. He destroyed the economy in a stroke on the advice of this Belgian Socialist. One wishes he had not listened.Anyway, that was part of what they were trying to recover from, this horrible disaster that had occurred in the mid-70s, I think.

Anyway, that was my message. Now I started delivering it as soon as I got there, and discovered that it indeed did fall on receptive ears.

Now people back in Washington remained skeptical as I would report that people were beginning to say the right kind of things, and that they did want an agreement with the IMF, and they were willing to bite the bullet on this, and do that and the other thing. People would say: Oh, we've heard that before, and then they don't do it, they don't perform. So there was a great deal of skepticism.

Q: Did you find, too, that your not being an African hand was sort of... I mean they said: Well he's a new boy on the block and he really doesn't understand Africa?

CONSTABLE: There probably was some of that back in Washington, yes. Fortuitously, I had only been there about a month and the Vice President came on a visit, on a swing through Africa. Bush was then Vice President, and he came into Zaire. So we were able to load him up with all of these talking points about: How we want to help you, Mr. Mobutu, and you are a good friend, and we've always had a good relationship, but we can't do anything unless you do some really hard and difficult things. That went very well, Bush's visit. Mobutu liked that.

Then they sent a team to Washington of a small group, maybe half a dozen of Mobutu's really close advisors. And Washington, at the working level, Assistant Secretaries and

Frank Wisner and people at AID and people at Treasury and up on the Hill, all hammered this message home.

And they came back and sat down with Mobutu and said, “You've really got to do something, and our only hope is if you do.”

So he was having some kind of a big political party confab shortly thereafter, and announced a whole series of reforms, an anti-corruption drive, which didn't go very far. But it did do one important thing. It, in effect, closed off the national treasury to the major raids, which had been so common before. Ministers were no longer able to just take their budget and put it in the Swiss bank account. So that was helpful.

Started a process of negotiation with the IMF, and that process took about a year, I think, nine months, to work out an agreement. And this involved some really hard things. They had to devalue the currency, going from about six zaires to the dollar up to 30 all in one stroke, and then let the currency float and have a free exchange rate control the budget — all of those hard things that IMFs make you do.

Through the whole process of discussion and negotiation there were a lot of skeptical people who said that, number one, he won't agree to it, and even if he does agree to it, he'll never keep it.

But he did agree, and he more or less kept it. They still have a program. There have been some ups and downs on it, but they still have an IMF program, we are now, five years later.

So that was my mission, and — mission accomplished. We were able to get Mobutu to do these difficult things and be a little more relaxed on some of the human rights things.

He was trying to curry favor in the United States and create a favorable impression, so he was wooing his opposition. Instead of throwing people in jail, he was bringing them back from exile and giving them government jobs again.

He was willing to deal with anybody. You could never go too far as an opponent of Mobutu. You could always come back, if you would recognize his supremacy. If you'd recognize his supremacy, you could have views on a whole lot of things. But you couldn't challenge him. When you challenged him, then you were out. But if you were willing to accept that he was going to be the supreme leader, then you could come home and make your peace.

Q: Would it be fair to say, I'm talking about your relationship with the African Bureau, that, in a way, although you had your mission, you were left somewhat alone? I've been told by people there that under Crocker the whole emphasis of the African Bureau was on South Africa. The Reagan Administration was South Africa, period, and the rest of it you did your business and did what you were supposed to do.

CONSTABLE: This was pretty true. Crocker didn't want to get involved in Zaire, but he attached some importance to trying to keep things from falling apart. So he gave the Zaire account, as he always put it, to Frank Wisner. And I needed somebody back in Washington to work on some of these things for me, because I couldn't do it alone from Zaire. I very quickly found that nobody in Washington wanted to hear about Zaire. They didn't want to touch it. They didn't want to talk about it. Zaire was poison.

So when we were getting to the point where something was happening in Kinshasa, and Mobutu was indeed doing some of the things that we wanted him to do, it took some intervention in Washington, which Frank supplied, to get the US government and the IMF to deal with this new reality and react to it in a positive way.

So, while your observation was generally correct, Frank Wisner really did involve himself.

Q: It's always interesting when somebody comes from another area to deal with a bureau that they haven't dealt with before. Did you get any impression of the African Bureau at that time?

CONSTABLE: Yes. I thought the leadership was exceptionally able. Chet Crocker and Frank Wisner are brilliant and clever people.

I always thought Crocker's constructive engagement policy was a brilliant concept. I'm personally very pleased to see that it has borne some fruit, indeed. I wish it had borne more while he was still there to reap it, but it's still his basic concept that's at play, and some good things are now happening. It's taken a long time, perhaps longer than people wanted.

Frank Wisner is a delight. He knows absolutely everybody in Washington and is one of the most effective bureaucrats I've ever seen. So, Frank is a person you want on your side of the issue if you can possibly arrange that.

That said, I think the bureau was not as strong as other bureaus. At the working level there are a lot of people who weren't terribly effective.

I think too much of the African Bureau is infected with what I would call feel-good liberalism, that here are all these poor suffering Black people, we must do something for them.

There's every reason to be sympathetic, but you can't base policy on those kinds of things. There have to be other bases in US self-interest that go beyond the humanitarian.

For one thing, I think you do no favor to African countries to try to postulate policy on: Oh, you poor people, let's help you. It has to be quite a different basis if they're going to do some of the things that really need to be done if they're to progress themselves.

Q: How did our policy in Angola impact on you?

CONSTABLE: While I was in Zaire, not nearly as much as it had before and it has subsequently. This was the period when Crocker was still going around trying to get something going on Angola. There were bits of dialogue, and the Zairians, of course, were very interested. So we talked to them about what was happening in Angola, and occasionally would ask them to talk to somebody or convey something or underscore a point.

But this was the period of the Clark amendment. There were no arms being run around across borders and so on. So it was not, as I say, an intense relationship.

Q: So your period, your work was really concentrated on...

CONSTABLE: It was very much focused on the issues of getting them into an IMF program and trying to turn them around on the economy, trying to get them to curb the excessive corruption, and on human rights. And I think on all three scores we made some headway. I don't think we revolutionized the country, but...

Q: Part of this though does represent an interesting thing. Here we are, you're an Ambassador from another country to another country, and yet we're really talking about major pressure — the role the United States has played and continues to play in other places. To me, it's not only a very positive, but it's also a very active role.

CONSTABLE: Yes, it was active, but I like to think of it as perhaps less intrusive than what your question implies.

We weren't really putting pressure on Zaire, we were trying to explain to Zaire the way the world works. And if you want to get something done, if you want more out of the US in terms of aid and so on, you've got to clean up your act in significant ways, and some very basic things have to happen. And not only is it in terms of your relations with us, but

it's just the health of your own country. You're going down the rat hole, and if you want to reverse that, there are certain things that have to be done for your own good.

And we were very careful to say, actually, that there may not be any great pay-out from the United States. We've got budget problems, and our foreign aid is certainly not going up, and you may not get anything out of this. You'll get some goodwill, and your image will be better, and people will look upon you more kindly, instead of as some sort of pariah out there who's messed up a beautiful country.

So it wasn't that we came in and started beating around. The process of doing this was also deliberately non-intrusive.

All those messages about: You've got to devalue, you've got to control your budget and so on, those were all delivered by the IMF.

They weren't delivered by Peter Constable going in and seeing the central bank guy. We would say to the central bank guy, to Mobutu, you have no choice except somehow come to grips with the IMF. But we were not providing the prescription, except in the broadest sense.

Q: So you were acting almost as a friend in court or something like that.

CONSTABLE: Yes. And at the end, when at the negotiating level with the IMF they had agreed to all the hard things, then we did use our political influence to get a somewhat hostile, many-times-burned IMF board to approve the program. And the head of the IMF, who had been burned so many times by Mobutu, was also gun shy, but we used our influence then, when Mobutu had committed his government to do these things.

Q: This is the point where we usually say "And then you retired..." and then we run off, but actually you took on a very interesting job. I wonder, in the first place, did you retire ready to retire? How did this work? And then what did you do?

CONSTABLE: While I was in this second year in Zaire, I basically felt I had done what I set out to do. From then on, in terms of that mission, it was sort of watching what they did and trying to encourage them to stay on the program. But the most challenging part of it had been done.

My friend, who was Director General of the Multinational Force and Observers headquartered in Rome (the peacekeeping organization that had been established to oversee the security provisions of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty), was assassinated...

Q: Ray Hunt.

CONSTABLE: Ray Hunt. ...probably by Red Brigades.

Q: Really for no particular... not really closely tied to the...?

CONSTABLE: No. I think there was probably a revenge element and perhaps a mistaken identity. You remember the General Dozier case?

Q: Yes.

CONSTABLE: The American General that the Red Brigades had seized in Italy. The Italian government found out where Dozier was and rescued him, and arrested a lot of Red Brigades. In the statements that were put out by terrorists after Ray Hunt was killed, they kept referring to him as “General Hunt,” not Director General Hunt. My surmise is that they thought he was an American military man, and that they were seeking to get somebody in revenge for the liberation of Dozier. Other than that, I really don't know.

Anyway, this was an organization that I was interested in, and obviously working in an area in which I was interested. So I let the department know that I would be interested in taking that on if they were looking for somebody to replace Ray. And of course they

were, and I said, “Fine.” In order to do that it was felt that I should retire from the Foreign Service...

Q: How old were you at this time?

CONSTABLE: That was 1984, so I was 52. ...that I should retire, because this was an international organization and, although the US had organized the MFO, put it together and provided a third of its budget, we didn't want to be seen by the other participants as completely controlling it as a US government. So that I would be able, if I retired, to act as an autonomous person. So I did, I agreed to do that.

One of the reasons was, having been Ambassador in a fairly big country like Zaire, I just wasn't sure I wanted to try to do a succession of ambassadorships. And this was something that was interesting.

I had always thought that I would try to retire early, that there must be a third of one's life beyond work, that one should do other things and exploit other interests. So I did that as a kind of transition to retirement.

Q: I just recently did an interview with Christian Chapman, who helped set up this... Was it Christian Chapman who helped set up this?

CONSTABLE: Mike Sterner was perhaps the key man in setting it up.

Q: Mike Sterner set this up, and so that would be an interview that somebody might want to refer to on some of the genesis of this. Could you explain what it was about and what you did?

CONSTABLE: As I said earlier, it was established to oversee the security provisions of the Camp David Accords, the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.

The peace treaty initially envisaged a U.N. force that would be placed in the Sinai. But because of Arab hostility to the Camp David Accords, and Soviet support for that opposition, it became apparent that it would not be possible to get Security Council authorization for a U.N. force.

President Carter and Begin and Sadat had foreseen this possibility during the negotiations. And Carter had provided a side letter that in the event the U.N. did not put in a peacekeeping force, the US would try to organize a multinational force that would do the peacekeeping in the Sinai. And so, indeed, that is what came to pass.

And Mike Sterner was involved in this process of negotiating a protocol between Egypt and Israel for the establishment of the MFO, and then negotiating with a number of countries for their participation in the MFO.

The end result was the creation of a force of about 2,700 military people who would be stationed in the Sinai, coming from ten different countries.

The headquarters was established in Rome, because the parties, Israel and Egypt, wanted it outside of the area, but close enough to the area so that there could be contact. They didn't want the headquarters in either of their countries, and there was nowhere else in the Middle East for them to reasonably do it.

Q: The only other one might be Athens, and that was so politically charged that...

CONSTABLE: I'm not sure Athens was even approached. I can't recall if that was considered.

Q: It would be very, very dubious.

CONSTABLE: It certainly was looked at, but I doubt if the Greeks would have wanted it. But the Italians did. And that was close enough to the Middle East to do it, so the

headquarters was set up there. The headquarters initially had about 35 expatriate employees and another 25 Italian support staff.

The field forces were then headed by a Norwegian General, now by a New Zealand General. There are three infantry battalions, a couple of air units, various logistical support units, and a group of about 25 observers, who are civilians, who go out on missions.

Their function is to certify that Egyptian troop levels in the Sinai are in accordance with those limits negotiated in the peace treaty, and similarly on the Israeli side of the border that their troop levels are within the limits prescribed.

It's the only long-term peacekeeping force that I know of that's been set up outside the U.N. This initially had its disadvantages, because there are many countries that only want to participate in something like this through a U.N. structure.

So it took some doing to persuade a number of countries to participate in this sort of ad hoc group. But once that initial breakthrough was done... Countries were also concerned about general Arab hostility to the peace treaty, and fearful that somehow their relations with, say, Saudi Arabia might be damaged. I think in the event there was no cause for that concern, and nobody has suffered from their participation in the MFO.

So it has worked very well now since '82 when it was introduced in the Sinai. From eight years later, I think it is well-respected by both the Israelis and the Egyptians. It performs its functions quite efficiently, I think.

During my tenure there we trimmed back the size of the force a little bit. Went down from 2,700 to 2.400. Reduced the budgetary expenditures on this effort. Got the Japanese to make a million-dollar-a-year contribution to our budget. So I think some good things happened.

People always ask me: “Is this necessary? Here they've been at peace for ten years. Ten years ago they signed the treaty. Why do you have a peacekeeping force there?”

And my answer is, “I think it will be necessary probably until there is a broader peace in the area, a general peace.”

The Israelis will never feel so secure that they would be willing to give up a peacekeeping force, until there is a general settlement with their Arab neighbors, because lurking in the backs of their minds is a fear that Egypt might somehow stray from the peace treaty.

Q: The '67 War was precipitated by a withdrawal of U.N. forces.

CONSTABLE: Yes, and a very important part of the agreement between Egypt and Israel is that the present peacekeeping forces cannot be withdrawn without mutual consent of both Israel and Egypt. It's very important to the Israelis that there not be a repetition of that withdrawal at a critical moment.

So I think the MFO provides assurance to both sides that the other is not working up to some kind of a military strike. We believe that's important.

Q: Of course we are talking about an area where there have been two surprise attacks — '67 and '73. Did you have any particular problems at that time, or would things really slide?

CONSTABLE: No, it really goes quite smoothly. And the reason it goes smoothly is that both Egypt and Israel really are, at this stage anyway, fully committed to a peace between them.

Now, that said, their relationship is not always of the greatest. The nature of their dialogue isn't always as good as one might hope. So there is a need for something like the MFO, or some form of peacekeeping, that can keep both sides reassured that nothing untoward is happening in their relationship, at least in the security side.

When the Israelis invaded Lebanon, the relationship between Israel and Egypt went into a kind of deep freeze, and they were barely speaking to each other. But the MFO, and the system of liaison between the MFO and the two governments, has, in difficult times like that, provided a kind of bridge and a way for a dialogue to take place that might not otherwise have happened. So I think it's useful, what goes on there.

Q: I take it you would go out and talk... What was your impression of the Egyptian's and the Israeli's military?

CONSTABLE: You mean their participation in the MFO as it started out, and their attitudes?

Q: Their attitudes and, also, as an outside observer, what did you think about how they operated?

CONSTABLE: The Egyptians, like so many Third World countries, have a lot of problems. They have a good officer corps, I think, but they've got big budget problems. They're poor, and their soldiers are poor, and they simply don't look as sharp sometimes as other soldiers. And their equipment isn't as good. And their living quarters aren't as good. But they're a large, professional army.

On the other side of the border you have a professional army, but it's highly supplemented by what I would call almost a civilian army — people who are drafted for a couple of years, come in and out, and then they're in the reserves, and then the reserves are called up for training exercises, and so on. So a big part of what the Israelis count as their military force is, most of the time, civilian. That's quite a striking difference between the two armies.

And then Israel is like a European country in terms of the level of development, as opposed to Egypt, which really is a Third World country. And you see this reflected in the military in the quality of equipment, quality of housing and uniforms, and that kind of thing.

Q: What's in it for, say, the Norwegians or other groups that are there? How do they, the people who are there...?

CONSTABLE: There are, I would say, two groups. There's one group that's there sort of for the money, if I may say so: the Fijians, the Colombians, and the Uruguayans. I think they liked the prestige of it, also, of being involved in something that's important and useful. But we paid them on a basis that was useful to them, particularly the Fijians and perhaps the Colombians. The Uruguayan unit was so small that the money probably didn't make much difference. But the Fijians had a whole battalion there, and so did the Colombians, and we were paying the so-called U.N. rate, roughly ten-dollars-a-day per soldier. So this was an important foreign exchange earner.

For other developed countries that participated, like Canadians and British and French and so on, I think their motives were mixed. They are interested in the area and in stability in the Middle East. But they have another motive, in some instances anyway, the experience that their military gets in a different area, in the Sinai, in the Middle East, a different kind of training experience that's useful for them.

Now we paid them on a totally different basis, the so-called incremental cost formula. We paid them over and above what it would cost them to maintain those troops in their home country, which was quite different from what we were paying the Fijians.

Q: How did the American troops react to this type of work?

CONSTABLE: I should say that this was quite a departure for American troops. We had not participated, certainly not with troop units, in peacekeeping forces under the U.N. We did have some observers in some different peacekeeping operations. At least not for a long, long time we hadn't. There had been kind of an unwritten rule that neither the Soviets nor the US would involve themselves.

But in order to get this one off the ground, and also the parties both wanted an American presence in the peacekeeping force, this introduced US troops into the Middle East context.

We had a little trouble with this at the beginning. There were those who charged that a US battalion in the Sinai was part of the American forward posturing, forward positioning, in the Middle East, and somehow was part of CENTCOM, and was a strike force to act in the Saudi peninsula, and so on. The Egyptians, for obvious reasons, were very sensitive to that kind of a charge. So we had to take a number of steps to keep that unit isolated from any other involvement with US policy or US interests elsewhere in the area.

That was sometimes easier said than done. There were some Generals back at the Pentagon who couldn't stop licking their chops. But, operationally, we had them very much under our direction, and they were not available for other activities or even under contingency planning.

On the staff level, the Americans loved it, loved being there. The US Army, as an institution, liked having the battalion out there. And it was rotated every six months. At first, there were just two divisions that were sending battalions out. That has now been expanded to four different divisions, so the experience has spread around more.

But they consider it a tremendous training experience. Just logistically, to actually pick up a battalion and deploy it 6,000 miles away or 8,000 miles away, is a tremendous experience. Then being able to train in a desert environment they found useful.

The down side for them was they were there as a peacekeeping unit. The mission is quite different from fighting wars. I think some of the units have found it a little difficult to change gears that way and remember going out...

Q: Which way do we point?

CONSTABLE: Yes. Talking to some of the American soldiers one time, I just asked one of these paratroopers, “Soldier, why are you here?”

He said, “I'm here to fight terrorists, sir!”

I said, “Well, I think we may need a little work on the mission here.”

The biggest problem with all of the battalions is boredom, trying to keep them interested and keep them going through their training paces and everything. They're sitting out on these little outposts, ten people out on an outpost, for a couple of weeks at a stretch, and they get bored. They just get bored.

Q: Well, Peter, you left then in 1988?

CONSTABLE: Yes, June of '88.

Q: Well, the last question I try to ask of everybody: If a young man or a young woman comes up to you and says, “What about the Foreign Service as a career?” how do you respond to that?

CONSTABLE: I find this more and more difficult, frankly, on two counts. One, is I don't think I like what I hear is happening in the Foreign Service now on the sort of politicization of the process, and attitudes, which I think have gone on now through three or four administrations, of a kind of denigration of the value of the Foreign Service.

But certainly up until the time I left, I still felt that there were some wonderful careers to be had in the Foreign Service, and you could do some marvelous things. You could end up in positions where you had a genuine and major impact on policy. And that's probably still true today.

From a more personal side, it seems to me it's tougher and tougher to reconcile family requirements and the Foreign Service. It's less and less common now for women not to

want a career, or spouses to want their own careers. I don't think it gets any easier to try to pursue those careers overseas in remote places.

I used to tell my sons and my daughter that if they were ever interested in the Foreign Service they'd better marry a teacher or a doctor or a nurse, people who could carry a career with them wherever they went. None of them has chosen to go into the Foreign Service.

But that's the toughest part, and I don't see how young people do this now. My wife is also in the Foreign Service, but we did most of our child-raising years when she was out of the Foreign Service. She had been forced out, because we got married, and then they changed the ground rules and invited spouses to come back, who had been forced out for reasons of matrimony or childbearing. So she did come back, but by the time she came back, and then we were here in Washington through a good part of that, so most of our children got grown up before we had to do a split, be in different places. And I just wonder how these young people try to do split assignments and keep a marriage going.

Q: It's very difficult.

CONSTABLE: Yes. I don't know the answer to it. I just don't know the answer at all.

Q: Well, thank you very much.

CONSTABLE: Well, thank you, pleasure.

End of interview